Existentialism in the Novels of James Kelman

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Declaration

This thesis has been composed by the candidate, and is the candidate's own work.

No part of this work has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or professional qualification.

Signed:

31 October 2000

Abstract

There has to date been no attempt at a detailed explication of James Kelman's novels from a consistently existential standpoint: this thesis constitutes an attempt to do so. Whilst a number of the critical responses engendered by Kelman's work mention the presence of existential motifs, this is usually done in passing. My central claim however is that it is impossible to comprehend Kelman's fictions without a thorough understanding and appreciation of the extent to which existential concerns inform both his fictional and critical work. I argue that a consequence of viewing Kelman as an existential writer is that the critical debate surrounding his work must be relocated and positioned outwith the dual contexts of nation and nationalism.

Chapter one delineates the constitutive elements of Kelman's existential aesthetic, focusing on five pivotal concerns: tradition, freedom, the everyday, locality and narrative. The next chapter considers several classic texts in the existential tradition, *Notes from Underground*, *The Trial*, *The Outsider* and *Nausea*. The techniques and themes brought out here, along with the observations generated in chapter one, provide a prism through which to read Kelman's novels. Chapter three analyses *A Chancer*, in terms of its narrative mode and how this relates to the existential theme of contingency which permeates the text. Next, I consider the role of the existential issues of temporality, negation and 'the nothing' in *The Busconductor Hines*. Chapter five examines *A Disaffection*, reading the novel in terms of Camusian absurdity and Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel. Chapter six is a reading of *How Late it Was, How Late*, which treats the novel as a fictional exposition of Sartre's theory of 'the look'. The final chapter offers some conclusions and criticisms, and considers the implications of Kelman's existential position, particularly with what might be termed 'cultural nationalism'. Here I also assess Kelman's place within the tradition of the committed intellectual.

Contents

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

MS Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942, trans. Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988)

BT Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1927, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

C James Kelman, *A Chancer* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985)

BH _____ *The Busconductor Hines*, 1984 (London: Dent, 1985)

D _____ *A Disaffection* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989)

HL _____ *How Late it Was, How Late* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994)

SRA _____ *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992)

BN Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, 1943, trans. Hazel E Barnes (London: Routledge, 1995)

WIL _____ *What is Literature?*, 1948, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1967)

Chapter One

What is Literature?

Ultimately, the individual [...] has to interpret in a quite individual way even the words he has inherited. His interpretation of a formula at least is personal, even if he does not create a formula: as an interpreter he is still creative. **Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*.**[1]

Sometimes an expression has to be withdrawn from language and sent for cleaning, - then it can be put back into circulation. **Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*.**[2]

A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former. **Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner'.**[3]

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[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1901, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §767, p.403.
[2]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, amended edn, ed. G H von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.39e.
[3]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner', trans. Annette Michelson, *Literary Essays* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp.79-87, p.79.

"The danger is in the neatness of identifications"[4]. Beckett's words although intended for Joyce, provide us with an apposite point of departure, for Kelman too is often neatly and unsuitably identified; whether as socialist realist, nationalist, or as a prose counterpart to MacDiarmid. This thesis does not constitute an attempt to evade taxonomy, rather it seeks to provide a more appropriate classification. Such reclassification is necessary, for Kelman, whether explicitly or not, is frequently positioned within a dialectic which sees him as both maintaining and moving out from, a Scottish or nationalist position. This forms one side of a crudely drawn *agon* where a supposed entity labelled 'English culture' is made to assume the position of antagonist[5]. Such a limited grasp of Kelman's writing infects the only book length study of his work to date, Dietmar Böhnke's *Kelman Writes Back*[6], a work which persistently commits Kelman to a rather muddled literary nationalism. Böhnke asserts that "the three terms 'national identity', 'nationalism' and 'internationalism' [...] form the starting point, backbone and guideline for the investigation of James Kelman's work" (7) What follows here is designed to show that this is mistaken, and that this mistake arises either from an inability to work properly through what Kelman intends when he describes himself as an 'existential' writer, or to fail to see him as existential novelist at all. Such confusion is at least partially understandable given that existentialism is a cluster of loosely linked philosophical and literary practices rather than a stable set of concepts or procedures. Sartre complained fifty years ago that "the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all" (*EH* 27-8): outwith philosophy departments little has changed. However, even those critical pieces which do detect an existential element in Kelman's work, either fail to refer to existential texts to substantiate their assertions or see Kelman's articulation of existential themes as being merely a subordinate component in some larger literary project. Consequently there is a gap in Kelman

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[4]Samuel Beckett, 'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', in Samuel Beckett et al, *Our Exagimination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929, rpt; London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp.3-22, p. 3.

[5]See for instance Alastair Renfrew, 'Them and Us? Representation of Speech in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', in ed. Alastair Renfrew, *Exploiting Bakhtin*, Strathclyde Modern Language Series, no. 2 (1997), 15-28, p.26.

[6]Dietmar Böhnke, *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of a Scottish Writer* (Berlin: Glada + Wilch, 1999).

studies. Against all of this, and to fill this gap, it is the central contention here that Kelman is a thoroughgoing existentialist writer, for even if we disregard Kelman's self-assessment, in terms of candidate interpretations existentialism pulls together and consistently illuminates all of Kelman's fictional and non-fictional output. However, it is important to mention here that throughout the following, 'existential' is applied to writers, such as Heidegger and Camus, who have explicitly rejected this term but who nonetheless by critical consensus articulate existential positions. As stated above, existentialism is a cluster concept, thus whilst Camus say retains the idea of a human nature, Sartre of course does not; Heidegger is critical of the term 'subjectivity' but it is frequently used by Kierkegaard. Existentialism is therefore used here as a family resemblance concept; scope and space dictate that I practice a necessary conflation. Consequently, what follows is therefore an existentialist reading, rather than say a purely Heideggerian or Sartrean reading.

The following chapter and the thesis as a whole emulates the Sartrean critical procedure outlined in the epigraph. Firstly, it is necessary to delimit the constitution and starting point of Kelman's position, the "metaphysics" to which Sartre refers. This chapter is therefore intended to represent as far as possible an understanding and reconstruction of what Kelman takes his broadly defined existentialism to be. Achieving this involves an assessment of the general issues arising from Kelman's position both in terms of his critical and prose writing, and an examination of how on occasion these have been misapprehended and confused with what might be assumed to be 'nationalist' positions. This assessment will involve an appraisal of the secondary literature devoted to Kelman's writing. However, this preliminary itself calls for a supplement. Since Kelman sees himself as operating out of a particular tradition, and since this tradition is so little discussed in the secondary literature devoted to his work, it is both justifiable and worthwhile to reappraise and in some instances recapitulate the key moments of existential fiction to which Kelman's own texts sometimes explicitly relate. Accordingly, chapter two is devoted to an inspection and reading of four 'classic' existential texts. Taken together, these two chapters serve then as the metaphysical definition for which Sartre calls. These chapters serve to move the parameters within which Kelman's fictions may be assessed. From here,

the thesis moves on to an existential analysis, an existential reading, of each of Kelman's four novels, examining how an existential metaphysic, in the Sartrean sense, translates into both a method of writing and also a particular subject of writing. These chapters assume that it is possible for fiction to express philosophical positions: this is not an altogether unproblematic claim, but such treatment does have sufficient precedent to justify its use here, and there can in any enquiry be no presuppositionless point of departure.[7] The argument offered here is predominantly ostensive and works by a process of incremental deferment. I choose to concentrate on the novels primarily for reasons of space but many of the resulting observations are equally applicable to the short stories and the drama.

Much critical analysis of Kelman's work begins with narrative or a consideration of language. Here this discussion is postponed, for Kelman's narrative position is dependent upon several antecedent considerations. It is these antecedents that are examined first.

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[7]We might initially note that both Sartre and Heidegger use fiction to illustrate philosophical points, see in particular Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought*, and Sartre's literary examples in *Being and Nothingness*. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Row, 1971). As a valid critical methodology consider for instance Roger Scruton in his 'Beckett and the Cartesian Soul': "I wish to explore certain themes in Samuel Beckett's prose works [...] and to bring these themes into relation with the philosophical ideas which explain them. [...] I wish to show how philosophical theories concerning the nature of the self underlie, and to some extent account for, the ingenious nature of Beckett's prose." Roger Scruton, 'Beckett and the Cartesian Soul', *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), pp.222-241, p.222. As the Sartre scholar Hazel Barnes notes, existentialism "since its beginning has tended to bridge the gap between the philosophical and the literary". For Barnes, fiction gave Sartre an opportunity to depict his philosophy in action. Hazel Barnes, *Sartre* (London: Quartet, 1974), p.68. This view is shared by Stephen Priest: "Literature is the art form in which Sartre expresses his own philosophy." Although pointing out a number of inconsistencies in Sartre's position, Priest nevertheless holds that Sartre's fictions both adumbrate and address philosophical problems. Ed. Stephen Priest, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.258, p.259. For further examples of the interplay between philosophy and literature see also John Cruickshank, *The Novelist as Philosopher: Studies in French Fiction 1935-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

For his 1997 American collection, *Busted Scotch*, Kelman was asked by his editor to provide an autobiographical foreword.

> You asked me to write an introduction [...] It took me three weeks' work to discover that that is the story of my life. I have now given up the project and content myself with the following comments:
> It was from an admixture of two literary traditions, the European Existential and the American Realist, allied to British rock music (influenced directly from Blues music, with an input from Country and Western), that I reached the age of twenty-two in the knowledge that certain rights were mine. It was up to me what I did. I had the right to create. I didn't have to write as if I was somebody not myself (e.g. an imagined member of the British upper classes). Nor did I have to write about characters striving to become other persons (e.g. imagined members of the British upper classes). I could sit down with my pen and paper and start making stories of my own, from myself, the everyday trials and tribulations; my family, my boss, the boy and girl next door; the old guy telling yarns at the factory; whatever. It was all there. I was privy to the lot. There was no obligation to describe, explain or define myself in terms of class, race or community. In spite of dehumanising authority people existed around me as entire human beings; they carried on with their lives as though the "forces of evil" did not exist. My family and culture were not up for evaluation. Neither was my work, not unless I so chose. Self-respect and the determination of self, for better or for worse. Some of this was intuitive, but not all.[8]

This short statement, incorporated into a talk delivered at the Glasgow School of Art[9], contains, though in a compressed and undeveloped form, the totality of Kelman's literary, philosophical and political positions. These positions, which constitute the basis of Kelman's existentialism, can be ranged under five interweaving and mutually dependent headings: tradition, freedom, the everyday, the local and narrative.

TRADITION

Effective exegesis of Kelman's work is on occasion disabled before it begins. In each interview and essay where Kelman reveals his influences, there is a painstaking account of what he takes to be the parameters within which and from which his work

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[8]'Letter to My Editor', *Busted Scotch: Selected Stories* (New York: Norton,1997), p.9.

[9]James Kelman, 'And the Judges said ...', *Variant*, 2.2 (Spring 1997), 20-23, p.20.

is to be read and placed. However, and perhaps through a poststructuralist suspicion of authorial declaration, these statements are often disregarded. Marjorie Palmer McCulloch[10], in her haste to assure that there is no "crisis" in modern Scottish fiction, exemplifies what might be termed the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* mode of Kelman criticism. For McCulloch, it is a case of 'after MacDiarmid therefore because of MacDiarmid'. In this reading, Kelman is seen as continuing the tradition of the Scottish literary Renaissance and *ipso facto*, the work of MacDiarmid in particular. McCulloch writes that one of MacDiarmid's most important legacies is "the confidence he has given Scottish writers to write out of their own experience and tongue, whatever that might be." (18) To McCulloch, Kelman's linguistic confidence, particularly as displayed in *A Disaffection*, proceeds from this source. This too seems to be Böhnke's position, although he does move between asserting that Alasdair Gray is the "father figure" of the new literary Renaissance to which Kelman belongs, and the assertion that Kelman's attitude to literary language is, no matter if Kelman denies it, authored by MacDiarmid (50-1). Whilst declining to couple Kelman and MacDiarmid, Rosemary Goring in her review of *The Good Times*[11] positions Kelman in a tradition reaching back through Tom Leonard, to Lewis Grassic Gibbon and James Hogg, though she does also note the presence of Céline, Nelson Algren and somewhat perplexingly, William Burroughs. McIlvanney too is noted as a literary companion. Now this attempt to join McIlvanney and Kelman, seeing in both a fiction devoted to an essentially realist articulation of 'Scottish' life has its problems. There is no need here to reheat their principal points of divergence, Cairns Craig[12] summarises their most pertinent disparities, but one of their few similarities helps explain why and in what ways all of the above readings are deficient, for the literary projects of Kelman and McIlvanney meet briefly around the question of tradition, or more precisely absence of tradition.

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[10]Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'What Crisis in Scottish Fiction?: Creative Courage and Cultural Continuity in Novels by Friel, Jenkins and Kelman', *Cencrastus*, no 84 (Summer 1984), 15-18.

[11]Rosemary Goring, 'Man Alive', *Scotland on Sunday*, Review Section, 12 July 1998, p.21.

[12]Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman' in eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp.99-114, p.101.

The introduction of both to the literary world, the formative years searching for antecedents and informative models is dominated by a persistent sense of lack. This lack appears not just in Scottish fiction, but extends throughout English-language fiction where there is a perceived absence of novels and stories which effectively articulate a specific cluster of what turn out to be existential issues. Through this want of domestic literary parentage, what Keith Dixon terms 'the orphan complex'[13], both McIlvanney and Kelman draw heavily on 'European' literature, finding here techniques and concepts which when imported, or translated into and applied to their own cultural specificity, give a procedural and conceptual basis unavailable through a reading of British fiction.

> I remember the joy of discovering Albert Camus' essay *Summer in Algiers* and realising that he was talking about my own people, with great insight and compassion. Such generously shared perceptions from other places and times were like finding out that what you thought was a dialect was, in fact, a language and one spoken in many parts of the world. It gave me the confidence to believe that, while I was writing out of my own experience, I was also writing towards the experience of countless others. The accent might be Scottish. But the message, whether they wanted it or not, was for everybody.[14]

"Writing out of my own experience", it is this phrase which catches and repeats an identical element in Kelman: "making stories of my own, from myself". What leads both to an appreciation and practice of existential fiction is this unification of fiction and individual experience. Existential writing, whether philosophical or fictional, validates this approach because the primary impulse of both literary and philosophical existentialism is to reveal the ordinary experience of everyday being-in-the world. For McIlvanney a sense of solidarity and an accommodating tradition is triggered by a reading of Camus and Kelman too reaches the existential through non-native writing.

> As a young writer there were no literary models I could look to from my own culture. I'm not saying these models didn't exist. But if they did then I couldn't find them. It was only later on, after I had started

[13]Keith Dixon, 'Talking to the People: A Reflection on Recent Glasgow Fiction', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol. 28 (1993), 92-104, p.97.
[14]William McIlvanney, 'A Shield Against the Gorgon', *Surviving the Shipwreck* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), pp. 217-37, pp.230-1

> writing, that I had the good luck to meet up with folk like Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead and others through getting involved with a writers' group led by poet and critic Philip Hobsbaum [...] but I was already writing and my first collection of stories was essentially completed prior to that. [...] So because of this dearth of home-grown literary models I had to look elsewhere. As I say, there was nothing at all in English literature, but in English *language* literature - well, I came upon a few American writers. I found folk whom I regarded as ordinary; here they were existing in stories, not as clichés, not as stereotypes. I was also discovering foreign language literature through translation; the Russians, the Germans, the French and others. I found literary models. I found ways into writing stories that I wanted to write; I could realize the freedom I had. I mean just the freedom other writers seemed to take for granted, the freedom to write from their own experience. ('The Importance of Glasgow in my Work', *SRA* 82-3)

Read alongside this quotation, Böhnke's pronouncement of Gray's paternity and responsibility for Kelman's prose suffers from, at best, anachronism, whilst MacDiarmid is simply nowhere to be seen. Another issue arises however in that this search for a legitimising tradition might *seem* to emerge from and motion to the familiar cluster of problems identified in the 1930s by Edwin Muir[15]. It needs however to be sharply distinguished. This is necessary because Muir's problems are activated only if one takes literature to move in and through *national* traditions. Muir constructs an 'English' tradition which serves as a paradigm against which a 'Scottish' tradition is found wanting. But Kelman and McIlvanney seek a tradition centred around a subject or a technique, not a tradition centred around a country or a nation. It is not possible to limit existential writing to a single geography, nor a single language, given that as a series of practices it springs from a variety of sources whether Danish, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish. Moreover, what Muir identifies as the shortcomings of native fiction, those qualities which prevent it achieving the alleged solidity of the German, French or English traditions - its lack of a national basis, its 'parochiality', its heterogeneity or movement toward the demotic - Kelman celebrates and takes as being primordial literary and cultural concerns.[16] For

[15]Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1936).

[16]Muir writes that the prerequisite of an "autonomous literature" is a "homogenous language". (19). Dialect, or 'Scots' is "not capable of the more exalted forms of reflection, expressing as it does everyday and local needs." (60) Muir contends that

Kelman, as against Muir and as against MacDiarmid, the search for and construction of a tradition has nothing to do with nation or nationality; nothing to do with the formation and maintenance of a homogenous national culture. It is instead a quest to find a mode of writing which not only foretells and contends with the structures and problematics of everyday life - as it is or as it might be experienced - but sees in this everyday life a legitimate source of material for literary creation. Within the work of both Kelman and McIlvanney, the perceived absence of an informing tradition does not indicate then an engulfed or extinguished *Scottish* literature and it is precisely this lack of a national basis that positions Kelman apart from what Douglas Gifford describes as the "lonely condition"[17] of the *Scottish* writer. For Kelman, it is not tradition *qua Scottish* tradition that is deemed a lamented absentee. Within British fiction, Kelman identifies the lack of a *thematic* tradition, a tradition which interests itself with and responds to, a complex of existential issues in an existential way. To Kelman, mainstream English *language* writing, with a few exceptions, either debases or neglects, stereotypes or marginalises, that which constitutes the existential: the everyday, the lived, the daily problems or the problematic daily of the lives of a majority of society.

Kelman writes that in moving outwith British fiction he "found folk whom I regarded as ordinary; here they were existing in stories" which generates a fictional impulse in which a text should show "*the* reality here, within this culture. Facticity or something like that."[18] From these quotations, it follows that Kelman intends existential in both its philosophical and pre-philosophical senses: effectively the two senses are merged. Thus 'existential' functions as both a basic synonym for "existing", and therefore a literature which can represent the world as experienced by say an unemployed

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"when we insist on using dialect for restricted literary purposes we are being true not to the idea of Scotland but to provincialism, which is one of the things that have helped to destroy Scotland" (178) and that "nobody who has not absorbed the English literary tradition can even express the contemporary life of Scotland." (181)

[17]Douglas Gifford, *The Dear Green Place?: The Novel in the West of Scotland* (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985). Though Gifford sees this as a uniquely Scottish phenomenon, his claims are, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to French or Russian writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[18]Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', *Chapman*, no. 57 (Summer 1989), 1-9, p.5.

frequenter of snooker halls and dog tracks; a writing which can render a world of gambling and unemployed boredom and yet also one which, without relegating or leaving this world, can contend with those pivotal philosophical existentials: facticity, contingency, freedom, and temporality. The critical component, that which must be grasped, is that this fiction is wholly immanent. Both Kelman, and McIlvanney, write from *within* these communities and cultures, the fictive standpoint is within the existential situation, the "facticity", not from without. For Kelman, a consistent disclosure of these concerns is glimpsed firstly in American writing and then in a general 'European' writing. In moving abroad for precedents, Kelman's position gestures towards and recalls that of Camus and that of Sartre, both of whom draw upon American literary models, and in a reciprocal movement Sartre is himself adopted as a model for later American writers, particularly Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Kelman too, in his earliest interview[19] nominates several American writers as providing a needed artistic solidarity and opening up a possibility of writing: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Mary Gray Hughes, Tillie Olsen, Sherwood Anderson, Isaac Babel and Isaac Bashevis Singer. With the exception of Isaac Babel, these writers correspond to the 'American realists' whom Kelman mentions in the preface from *Busted Scotch* quoted above. Here, and against the notion that Kelman's texts proceed from and are centred upon a 'masculine' conception of literature, it is fiction by women to which Kelman initially responds: "the writers at the root of the American realistic tradition have mainly been women".[20] For Kelman, "women have had [...] one of the most influential roles in literature, simply because women have had to fight against the existing value, and that value is a paternalist male value."(ibid.) Concomitantly, in his interview with Anne Stevenson, Kelman views his position as being analogous to "black" writers. All write as 'outsiders', for both women and 'black' writers have been excluded from the canon, and as a consequence both have adopted certain strategies, or of equal importance, held certain techniques and concerns off limits, in order to construct alternative canons. When combined with Kelman's fondness for American music, something

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[19]Anne Stevenson, 'Off the Buses', *Scotsman*, Weekend Section, July 14 1973, p.2.
[20]Kelman in ''K is for Culture': Interview with Scottish Writer James Kelman', *Scottish Trade Union Review*, no. 68 (January/February 1995), 24-29, p.26.

shared by Sammy Samuels in *How Late*, it becomes clear that Kelman's construction of an existential tradition, takes up and absorbs diffuse facets. As a formative practice, it therefore both calls back to and pursues a Nietzschean interpretation, or a form of Heideggerian *Destruktion*, wherein artistic predecessors are reread, interrogated, for what they divulge of the existential or factical.[21] As Sartre takes from Husserl or Dos Passos those elements which he finds favourable to the fictional representation of existential themes, so Kelman simply appropriates those facets with which he is in agreement, which correspond to his own formulation of the existential. Blues and country and western music provided artists who "sang of their own existence, in their own voice, from their own emotion." ('And the judges said ...', 20) whilst from American literary precedents, Kelman found stories "about pioneering communities, gamblers and rounders; boys who liked horses and wanted to be jockeys or newspapermen; tramps, cowboys, gangsters; small towns and big cities. All were rooted in a life that was recognisable, more or less, the lived-in, the everyday." (ibid.) This pool of influence is supplemented by European fiction.

> Equally significant for myself was a strain in European literature that asserted the primacy of the world as perceived and experienced by individual human beings. These individual human beings were mainly government clerks or mixed-up members of some kind of minor land-owning class. It was a society far removed from my own, both in place and time. But for some reason I could read the work of these 19th century writers, mainly Russian, with a definite empathy. Gogol and Dostoevski made me chuckle in ways that seem a contradiction in terms in respect of mainstream English literature. Irony requires some sort of a mutual recognition of selfhood, and I was not excluded from it. English literature did not allow this, people like myself were a sub-species and generally excluded by definition. (ibid.)

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[21]I refer here to the passage from *The Will to Power* which I use as an epigraph. As John Caputo points out, Heidegger's notion of *Destruktion* "does not destroy but breaks through to the originary factical experiences from which the text arises". John D Caputo, 'Heidegger' in eds. Simon Critchley and William R Schroeder, *A Companion to Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.223-223, p.224. Michael Inwood suggests that *Destruktion* is best understood as an "interpreting" or "disentangling" using the works of the past "as a basis for new thoughts of our own". Michael Inwood, *Heidegger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.51.

Here Kelman's reading of Russian fiction generates the same response as McIlvanney's reading of Camus. Although separated by a language, and in the case of classic Russian fiction, separated by time, what emerges is a fictive solidarity, a sense that in these works the societal structures and equally the protagonists who have to negotiate them, have a continuing and pertinent resonance. A fiction located in nineteenth-century St Petersburg can still correspond and connect with a fiction set in twentieth-century Glasgow. Philip Hobsbaum, recalling the writing group of which Kelman and Tom Leonard were a part, describes the latter's *Six Glasgow Poems* as "a living example of the fact that to speak from the heart of one community is to say something cogent about them all."[22] Kelman works upon and reads from an equivalent basis. Key here is the underlying existential structure. What must be grasped then are not what these texts say about *Russian* life or *pied noir* life or *Glasgow* life but what they say of life itself; what they reveal about a life lived through and out from a factical background, a culture. Through an analysis of a particular, they bring forth a universal. Thus it is culture *qua* culture that is of value. Not Glasgow culture, not Scottish culture, not English culture (and as we shall see, Kelman has a particularly existential problem with these last two terms) but simply culture.

To the everyday identified in American realism, Kelman adds the primacy of the individual, but importantly an individual of a certain social status (Gogolian clerks, Chekhov's minor landowners). We have a fiction of the everyday, an artistic stance premised upon the importance of an individual in an individual set of circumstances. This individual is neither a social aspirant nor a member of the upper-class, simply an individual.

> There is a literary tradition to which I hope my own work belongs, I see it as part of a much wider process, or movement, towards decolonisation and self determination: it is a tradition which assumes two things, 1) the validity of indigenous culture, and 2) the right to defend it in the face of attack. It is a tradition premised on a rejection of the cultural values of imperial or colonial authority, offering a defence against cultural assimilation [...] it's an argument based solely on behalf of validity, that my culture and my language have the right to

[22]Philip Hobsbaum, 'The Glasgow Group: An Experience of Writing' *Edinburgh Review*, no. 80-81 (1988), 59-63, p.60.

> exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right. [...] The second literary tradition to which my work belongs is the existential tradition.[23]

Since as we have seen, Kelman's writing does not proceed from 'Scottish' sources, this quotation, from Kelman's truncated Booker prize speech, needs to be reassessed. Misreading of this passage leads too easily to what I have elsewhere described as the fallacy of 'affirming the consequent'[24]. Dietmar Böhnke reads this as a declaration of nationalist intent, and perhaps to make this reading more acceptable, when using the quotation as an epigraph, he omits the passage which mentions the existential tradition. The latter existential tradition is though not something which can be treated as separate, or dispensable, for it not only colours the first tradition, it already contains it. Within any existential conception of identity, determination begins with the self, and this self is individual not national: determination is relative to the "my", to what Heidegger would identify as Dasein's 'mineness'. Kelman's Booker speech needs to be read alongside his later statement in *Variant*

> At the Booker prize ceremony a couple of years ago I upset some people by what I was arguing, which was not a plea for separatism, nor for nationalism, nor for the world to recognise the supremacy of Scottish culture [...] all of which was reported by various media. [...] It is simply to say that the existence of my culture is a fact and why should that be denied? It's an argument not for the supremacy of my culture, just for its validity, and by extension, the validity of any culture. There is no such thing as an invalid culture, just as there is no such thing as an 'inferior' or 'superior' culture. What else is a culture but a set of ideas, beliefs, and traditions held by any community of people: a set of infinite extension, shifting and changing. Cultures will function in the same way as languages, not to mention the people who use them: unless dead they live. ('And the judges said ...', 23.)

This differs from a nationalist position in that it revolves around the singular 'my'. Culture as described here retains the fluidity and malleability characteristic of individual existential identity. It is neither fixed nor static, it is not something which needs to be sought in the past because it is living, acting: it is here and now. In linking itself to the enunciation of a culture, Kelman's writing nonetheless eschews the

[23]*Sunday Times*, Scottish Section, 16 October 1994, p.21.
[24]Laurence Nicoll, ''This is not a nationalist position: James Kelman's existential voice', *Edinburgh Review* 103 (2000), 79-84, p.80.

vectors of conventional literary realism. His mode of writing seeks to distinguish itself from what might be loosely termed 'socialist realism' or 'naturalism'. The existential tradition Kelman tells us

> is also a point of departure for some materialist strains of left-wing thought which, ultimately, are as authoritarian as the right-wing. These ideologies also debase and dehumanise individual existence, forcing people into the 'scheme of things', not allowing them the freedom to live as whole beings. Unlike fantasy and romance 'committed' artists here reveal their commitment in their work - their particular form of socialism or whatever - as a function of its representation or approximation to 'the real world', i.e. naturalism or 'social realism' so-called. Stories, paintings, music, drama and so on are duty-bound to concern 'the harsh reality', i.e. the effects of, and the struggle, against the capitalist system. The central characters rarely have time to tell a joke, fall in love, get drunk or visit the lavatory, although sometimes they are allowed to visit museums, libraries or art galleries, or do evening classes with a view to 'bettering' themselves. ('And the judges said ...', 20)

Kelman does not deploy a prose which adumbrates a prefabricated Marxian conception of class struggle. Such 'realism', Kelman's "so-called" is telling, shears away freedom precisely because it compresses and consigns character and/or plot to a predetermined ideological position - Marxism after all is a mode of thought acutely reliant upon social determinism: economic base determines societal superstructure. Upon such a realist position, artistic validity is gauged solely against an already ordained ideologically led structure of class struggle. If the literary work does not correspond to this structure, then it is effectively *un*real. However, happy workers engaged in ploughing a field or slum-dwelling families tormented by unscrupulous landlords is not what Kelman takes realism to be. "Realism is the term used to describe the 'detailing of day-to-day existence'".[25] One cannot depict the diurnal if one has an eye on the Historical. Day-to-day existence includes getting drunk, falling in love, having a joke, but also alienation, estrangement, boredom, the experience of contingency. Gavin Wallace,[26] although noting that Kelman "refines and redeems" the

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[25]James Kelman, 'Alex La Guma (1925-1985)', in ed. Murdo Macdonald, *Nothing is Altogether Trivial: An Anthology of Writing from Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp.157-162, p.160.

[26]Gavin Wallace, 'Introdution', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, pp.1-7, p.3.

conventions of realism, nonetheless suggests that Kelman's fictions are indebted to the parameters of working-class realism established in the 1950s. Wallace does not identify the writers he intends, but if they include Braine or Sillitoe then his assertion becomes problematic.

> John Braine you can't take seriously. Alan Sillitoe is probably a trier. John Braine probably can't remember when he sold out, he sold out so long ago, you know he's like Kingsley Amis or something, his work's just junk, basically. So few writers ever seem to work things out about narrative, the existential in literature and art, I doubt if they know what it really is, and its importance politically. You can't get to it through English or Scottish literature alone, you have to move through different cultures, other traditions maybe - you've got to really appreciate the significance of Gogol's 'Overcoat' for a start.[27]

Part of Kelman's difficulties with traditional realism is present in both this quotation and that taken from 'And the judges said ...' above. It is brought forth through the mythic 'lad o' pairts', the uncouth individual 'rescued' from his degenerate culture by education or by what Kelman terms "the heroic pleb [...] in the work of social realism." ('Artists and Value', *SRA* 13) For Kelman, allegedly realist novels which propound this type of cultural escapism are complicit in an act of cultural belittlement and they are thus 'anti-existential'[28]. They are anti-existential because what Kelman identifies as a prompt to these fictions is the suggestion that some cultures, in particular what might be termed 'working-class' culture, can neither sustain nor accommodate intellectual activity, nor can these cultures or the individuals who form and move among them, provide in themselves sufficient material upon which to base fiction. To depict education, or assimilation within the middle-classes as a means of salvation merely insists that self-improvement only becomes possible outwith one's environment, outwith one's culture. Kelman's criticism of this supposed 'betterment' is articulated through Robert Hines:

> And education was, after all, the Scottish Way. Surely this erstwhile nation had once been the forerunner of the concept of Equal Opportunity at a Spiritual Level. [...] Why, throughout the length and

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[27]Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', p.5.
[28]The term is Kelman's. See 'Let the Wind Blow High Let the Wind Blow Low', *Some Recent Attacks*, p.87.

> breadth of this grey but gold country toty wee mites were being befriended by the Sons of the Laird and going on to become steely-eyed village dominies or gruff but kindly members of the medical profession, and even preachers of the gospel in far-flung imperial establishments. (*BH* 95)

As David McCrone points out, the lad o' pairts was "an individual who escaped his working- class or peasant origins."[29] Kelman however wants to keep his characters culturally situated, this is a central issue in his conception of realism, but this realism is not however simply mimetic, for Kelman's relation to realism is ambiguous; it hovers between conceptions, refusing to settle, and so renders definition problematic. Whilst a number of short stories, 'Acid', 'The chief thing about this game', depict the precarious life of the industrial labourer, others, 'O jesus, here come the dwarfs', 'Incident on a Windswept beach' have a parabolic quality: they do not cash out in a strictly reflective text/world correspondence. This parabolic strain indicates the presence of a particular brand of realism, one that we might identify as Kafkaesque, which for Kelman signifies a narrative "where the world is absolutely mysterious"[30]. This is what Sartre terms "fantastic realism"[31]. However, to appreciate this modified realism, in addition to Kafka, we need also to consider the significance of the writer to whom Kelman specifically refers us: Gogol. Surprisingly, given Kelman's avowal that in order to understand his own writing you have to understand the significance of Gogol, no critic has yet made an attempt to do so. Yet Gogol seeps into and can be detected through Kafka's writing, and in constructing his own fictions Kelman makes extended use of both. Specifically, it is Gogol's 'Petersburg Tales'- 'Diary of a Madman', 'The Nose' and 'The Overcoat'- that deploy fictional devices and consistently focus upon themes which are pivotal in Kelman's writing. As Richard Peace notes, Gogol practices a prose which imports locutions not normally encountered in literary Russian, a clear resonance with Kelman's own attacks upon the literary 'establishment'. Relevant too is the way Gogol disrupts the constitution of

[29]David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.98.
[30]Ian Jack, 'Uncensored voice of a native son', *Independent on Sunday*, Review Section, 28 April 1991, pp.26-7, p.26.
[31]Jean-Paul Sartre, '"Aminadab", Or the Fantastic Considered as a language', trans. Annette Michelson, *Literary Essays* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp.56-72.

Russian fiction by redirecting its focus, for he writes not of types, nor of the princes or heroes of the Russian oral tradition but of the ordinary individual. Gogol's writing

> is no longer that of a rural community steeped in tradition and folklore. It springs rather from the distorted vision of isolated individuals, driven in upon themselves by a city environment in which they feel themselves insecure.[32]

This experience of the unreal and fantastic metropolis portends Robert Hines "grey but gold" city and Patrick Doyle's description of Glasgow as the "antichthon". As Peace points out, Gogol's Petersburg is a city cleansed of both history and nostalgia, for Gogol's narrative never wavers from a resolute presentness. Gogol portends the sudden transformation and inexplicable metamorphosis which we encounter in Kafka, motifs which recur in Kelman when Sammy Samuels wakes up blind, and Patrick Doyle transforms electricians' pipes into musical instruments. This motif of inexplicable change, taken with the absence of the historical, connects with the existential notion of a world which lacks a prior cause. The individual emerges for no reason in an alien world which he must negotiate. Perhaps the most perspicuous and clearly apprehensible Gogolian trace in both Kelman and Kafka is the downtrodden clerk pressed into a world of monotony and stranded in a seemingly purposeless job. 'The Overcoat', depicts a structured, hierarchical society, within which a humble copyist, Akaky Akakievich Bascmachkin, struggles.

> Exactly *when* he entered the department, and who was responsible for the appointment, no one can say for sure. No matter how many directors and principals came and went, he was always to be seen in precisely the same place, sitting in exactly the same position, doing exactly the same work - just routine copying, pure and simple. Subsequently everyone came to believe that he had come into this world already equipped for his job, complete with uniform and bald patch.[33]

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[32]Richard Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol: An Examination of the Writings of N V Gogol and their Place in the Russian Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.94.
[33]Nikolai Gogol, 'The Overcoat', *Diary of a Madman and other Stories*, trans. Ronald Wilks (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.71-108, p.73.

Akaky, the narrator informs us, has an uncertain ancestry, no one knows the origins of his name and in the excerpt quoted above, this causal indeterminacy is bolstered by the absence of any recollection as to his appointment. The societal structures, directors and principals, are mentioned, but it his designated task as a copyist which is of significance. Within rigid structures, Akaky's freedom is curtailed to such an extent that he seems fated to a uniform and uniformed task, endlessly replicating the words of others. A further passage following the theft of his coat portends the labyrinthine nature of the state apparatus:

> Don't you know how things are conducted here? It's high time you knew that first of all your application must be handed in at the main office, then taken to the chief clerk, then to the departmental director, then to my secretary, who *then* submits it to me for consideration" ('Overcoat', 99)

An environment at once familiar from the texts of Kafka, the Gogolian world is existentially appropriable for the way in which it casts the solitary individual against an overarching regulatory system. Akaky, is the distant ancestor of Joseph K. and yet also of Robert Hines, Patrick Doyle and Sammy Samuels, all of whom in their varying ways seek to disengage from a systematic society or a state supervised society.

One of the most perceptive articles on Gogol and his relationship to Kafka is by Carlos Fuentes[34], indeed, Fuentes goes so far as to describe Gogol as Kafka's "elder brother" ('Gogol' 90). Fuentes argues that the central theme of Gogol's prose is identity, or more specifically a problematised identity. "Identity is problematic because it is always becoming, on the road, in exchange, in doubt, in inspiration." (ibid 123). Identity is a felt absence, something mutable and impermanent. It is dimly made out through those structures that constitute the unreality of the world. For Fuentes, Gogol's fictions endeavour to

> discover the hidden reality, the reality one can reconstitute behind the appearance of dispersion. There is a true reality behind the screen of social position, bureaucratic function, the false identity that others give us, and above all, behind a falsifying use of language. ('Gogol', 102)

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[34]Carlos Fuentes, 'Gogol', *Myself with Others: Selected Essays* (London: Picador, 1988), pp.89-124.

The use of narrative elements to evade the falsification of language is explored below, but here we should note that Gogol introduces the vulgar and the hitherto insignificant into literature. Gogol's work focuses upon the seemingly insignificant and the marginalised. Both through the construction of a fantastic world, where noses are found in pastries and ghosts walk abroad in search of stolen coats, Gogol depicts a place where identity has to be fought for, asserted (usually in vain) against the pressing, omnipresent weight of external determinants. It is this mode of ambiguous realism that Kelman adopts. Consider the early short story 'The Hon' from *Short Tales from the Nightshift*. Now if we wish to persist in treating Kelman as a mimetic realist, then it would be a curious reading indeed which could achieve such a simple correspondence from a piece in which an old man feels a hand reach out to grab him whilst he is sitting on the toilet. For Kelman, verisimilitude is not the desideratum; it is a problematised and precarious freedom revealed through art that qualifies his texts as being 'real'. In this Kelman reproduces a pivotal component in the fictions of Kafka. A piece such as 'The Burrow' plays itself out in this Gogolian arena, for it dramatises, as many of Kelman's own pieces do, the fundamental insecurity of life, but it does so through a 'fantastic' situation. It is, the reader assumes, related by an animal which exists in constant fear of the breach of its burrow. This cannot be cashed out in terms of a simple naturalism. Fantastic realism, whether from Gogol, Kafka or Kelman is a tradition which prompts the reader into undertaking a questioning of the 'real' outwith the text; it encourages the reader to ponder the make up of the 'real' by deliberately skewing, highlighting or disturbing the textual 'real'. Reality emerges through the reader's grasp of the existential problem which the text produces. It is the problem that is real, even if events in the story intended to elicit it are not.

Fuentes sees the Gogolian tradition at work in Kafka, and he detects his influence too in the work of Milan Kundera. The latter supplies some of the most rewarding and useful criticism of Kafka[35], for the issues which Kundera sees as central to the construction of the Kafkaesque, what he terms the 'Kafkan', simultaneously reveal the parameters within which Kelman works. Kundera centres this around freedom.

[35]Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

FREEDOM

Freedom is the most primordial of existential concerns, whether freedom of action, freedom of value or freedom to determine the self.

> whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject - freedom. (*WIL* 46)

The keynote and pedal point of Sartrean existentialism, freedom both underwrites and composes the endpoint of Sartre's philosophy and it fulfils a similarly architectonic purpose in both the fictional and critical writing of Kelman: "Human freedom is so inalienable a right that it can scarcely be described as a 'right' at all, it is the very essence of what it is to be a person."[36] Both Sartre and Kelman grasp freedom in a Kantian sense[37]. Freedom is certain, it is not argued for, nor is it negotiable, and as can be seen in the quotation immediately above, Kelman constructs freedom along explicitly Sartrean lines: human beings *are* freedom, this is their paradoxical 'essence'. However as a basic philosophical premise it also drives an artistic conception and Kelman renders himself an existentialist through translating Sartre's basic ontological 'picture' into an aesthetic one.

> The for-itself is defined ontologically as a *lack of being*, and possibility belongs to the for-itself as that which it lacks. [...] The for-itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack. (*BN* 565)

Sartre depicts human being as first and foremost a lack, a nothing, which then produces, detects, 'secretes', a subsequent nothing or lack in the world, these absences are what Sartre, following Heidegger, terms "possibilities"[38]. Consciousness

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[36]James Kelman, 'A Reading from Noam Chomsky and the Scottish Tradition in the Philosophy of Common Sense', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 84 (1990), 46-76, p.51.

[37]As Roger Scruton points out, frequently for Kant, "the certainty of my freedom is as great as the certainty of anything." Scruton continues: "This argument occurs, in more rhetorical form, in the writings of Sartre, whose existentialist doctrine of the moral life owes much to Kant." Roger Scruton, *Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.59.

[38]Heidegger describes the essence of Dasein as its existence, the essence of Dasein "lies in its "to be"", "In each case Dasein *is* its possibility". (*BT* 67, 68) Sartre writes:

directs itself towards an absence in a process of double nihilation (suggesting too a possible motivation for the doubled 'not' in the story 'Not not while the giro'). This then is the movement and constitution of ontological freedom, but it simultaneously circumscribes the issues attaching to the question of tradition discussed above, for Kelman's construction and pursuit of a literary tradition replicates precisely this philosophical movement. We saw that Kelman's initial literary experience is coloured by a sense of lack and that changing this, writing to fill this absence, was posited as a possibility, a future nothingness. In Sartre and Kelman, ontological freedom therefore impinges upon and is made manifest through artistry, through the compositional act itself. As the existential self is made from nothing, Sartre insists that Art too comes "out of nothingness" (*WIL* 113): "I cause a nothingness of being to arise which constitutes the writing of [a] book as a possibility". (*BN* 41)

Art and freedom are therefore inexorably linked. Camus writes that freedom as a theme is "inseparable from freedom of expression."[39] Freedom of expression entails both a positive and a negative liberty. Artistic freedom as Kelman conceives it, is negative in that it is a freedom *from* imposed values, whether of form, subject or technique. Literature, again like the existential subject, is created without any standards being given in advance, this is what Sartre means when he describes literature as "unconditional". (*WIL* 113) At this stage positive liberty, the freedom *to*, enters. Any literary artist begins with a nothingness, a possibility, a *tabula rasa*, and how this blank page is to be filled is entirely a matter of choice or selection on behalf of the author.

> I don't start up stories with ideas, I just actually begin a story from nothing, like the way a sculptor operates, I just begin from writing some words down and gradually I make a story out of it. The old Scottish term 'makar' really, that's the way I see it. You make a story. You begin from the words, like a craftsman in that sense, and you just make a story. I don't begin with any idea of what the story will be, I just begin and go on from there. ('K is for Culture', 26)

"I constitute myself as the comprehension of a possible as *my* possible" (*BN* 41).
[39]Albert Camus, *Carnets 1935-1942*, trans. Philip Thody, 1962 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p.71.

Again the comparison between ontology and aesthetics holds here. The text like the *pour-soi*, comes to be through a series of choices, and these choices are always made into the future: "just begin and go on from there." Literature is both the exercise and product of a free act, but for Sartre, although the artist is free, to be authentic or properly committed, his subject too must be freedom and his work must be addressed to the freedom of the reader.

> Since the creation can find its fulfilment only in reading, [...] to write is to make an appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation which I have undertaken by means of language. [...] Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work. (*WIL* 32)

Sartre sets into play then a dialogue of freedoms. Reading becomes an "induction, interpolation [and] extrapolation" (*WIL* 38) wherein the freedom of the literary act effects a corresponding movement in the reader. Writing discloses to the reader his or her own freedom and it is the freedom of the reader that activates the latent freedom of the text. All literary work, Sartre presumably means all *committed* literary work, revolves around this appeal[40] and the appeal itself is designed to unsettle reactionary values. The writer "gives society *a guilty conscience*; he is thereby in a state of perpetual antagonism towards the conservative forces which maintains the balance he tends to upset." (*WIL* 60). Kelman's polemical aesthetic operates from within this established Sartrean position. In developing a consistently hostile stance towards the canonical representatives of English (language) literature, he ensures that the questions of who founds the canon, who deems this text or that worthy of inclusion, who or what is excluded from this canon and upon what grounds, are exercised by the reader's attentive engagement, the reader's freedom. He also ensures that issues relating to artistic freedom are kept in play.

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[40]Worth mentioning here is that Sartre famously and tendentiously insists that only prose or drama can be 'committed' in this way. Poetry cannot 'reveal' because in poetry language is opaque, words become objects, referring only to themselves. For Sartre only the supposed transparency of the sign as found in non-poetic forms can produce the necessary compositional apparatus of literary commitment. Significantly, Kelman has produced short stories, novels and plays but never poetry. Heidegger however places greater value upon poetry. See Michael Inwood, *Heidegger*, p.111.

Freedom though is also the primary existential subject. However, as we shall see in the ensuing chapters, the existential tradition tends toward the description of what Sartre terms 'trapped freedoms'.

> Let this freedom manifest itself in our novels, our essays, and our plays. And if our characters do not yet enjoy it, if they live in our time, let us at least be able to show what it costs them not to have it. (*WIL* 206)
>
> the writer knows that he speaks for freedoms which are swallowed up, masked, and unavailable. (*WIL* 49)

Existential literature depicts problematic freedoms, precarious freedoms. Tammas, Robert Hines, Patrick Doyle and Sammy Samuels are all at some level curtailed, frustrated. It is Milan Kundera who formulates the principal questions which Kafka's fictions pose: "What possibilities remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry any weight?"; What are the possibilities for man in the trap the world has become?" (*The Art of the Novel*, 26, 48) These too are the questions which Kelman's fictions will ask and to answer these questions, Kundera writes that one must have a certain understanding of what the world is.

THE EVERYDAY

We have then an area of thematic investigation, freedom, and Kelman follows philosophical existentialism in positioning this analysis within a particular environment: the concrete world of the everyday. The 'concrete', Sartre tells us, is "man within the world in that specific union of man with the world which Heidegger, for example, calls "being-in-the-world."" (*BN* 3).

> The theme of our analytic is to be Being-in-the-world, and accordingly the very world itself; and these are to be considered within the horizon of average everydayness - the kind of being which is *closest* to Dasein. We must make a study of everyday Being-in-the-world. (*BT* 94)

The hyphenation in being-in-the-world, indicates a necessary connection, an interdependence. For human being, the world is, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor, the 'inescapable framework' in which being is encountered and into which being is thrown. This basic existential conjunction is vividly expressed in the story 'Pictures' from *The Burn*, which opens with the narrator contemplating suicide: "the destruction of himself meant the destruction of the world anyway because with him not there his world wouldnt be either." (*Burn* 1) Without a world there is no being; without a being there is no world. Now this coupling of being and world, carries with it a challenge and a reconstitution of the subject matter of philosophy. Broadly, existential thinking rejects the abstracting proclivity of the western philosophical tradition, whether Husserlian bracketing, Cartesian rationalism with its retreat from the world, Hume's bifurcation between his philosophical activity and his everyday activity as a person, or what Kierkegaard characterises as Hegelian abstraction. Existentialism moves philosophy from the study to the street, and in so doing simultaneously recasts what is philosophically significant. "You see [...] if you're a phenomenologist, you can talk about this drink and that's philosophy."[41] Sartre's introduction to phenomenology, via Raymond Aron, takes place in a café, and *Being and Nothingness* relies upon illustrations and examples drawn from literature or the everyday world of cafés and bars. Sartre follows Heidegger in rejecting the transcendental idealism in phenomenology whilst still retaining its method.[42] Phenomenology, Sartre concludes, cannot be divorced from ontology. Ontology deals with situated being since to exist as a subject is to exist in a world: man cannot be divorced from the world. A consideration of ontological structures must therefore include an analysis of the structures *in situ*.

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[41]Quoted in Ronald Hayman, *Writing Against: A Biography of Sartre* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986), p.92.

[42]For details see Michael Hammond, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat, *Understanding Phenomenology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). See in particular chapter four, 'Existentialism and Phenomenology', pp. 96-126.

Heidegger's philosophy, adopted and adapted by Sartre, approximates the means of creating fiction advanced by Albert Camus. For Camus, the writer should "stick to what is ordinary",[43] and this ordinariness is the everyday.

> If I have tried to define something, it is, [...] simply the common existence of history and of man, everyday life with the most possible light thrown upon it, the dogged struggle against one's own degradation and that of others. (*MS* 188)

Like Camus' aesthetic, the everyday, when encountered in existential philosophy is intended to designate the existent's most characteristic mode of being-in-the-world. For Heidegger, everyday being-in-the-world is characterised by what he terms 'concern':

> Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining .... All these ways of Being-in have *concern* as their kind of Being [...] Leaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest - these too are ways of concern; but these are all *deficient* modes [...]. (*BT* 83)

Thus what Kelman sees as the uniting principle of his early work, "getting by", has clear affinities with Heidegger's notion of Dasein as a 'coping' or 'concerned' being, engaged in activities within the world. This commitment to the everyday, the lived as opposed to the conceptual, can be seen both in Kelman's prose and his critical work and explains his commendation and attraction for the situations and settings he found in American Realism. Although Kelman's prose style develops, its subject matter, this concernful average everydayness, never alters. Now a commitment to the everyday may seem in conflict with the earlier claim that Kelman on occasion utilises the methods of fantastic realism, but fantastic realism itself depicts the everyday. As Sartre explains, "In order to achieve the fantastic, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to portray extraordinary things."[44] Everyday existence is itself fantastic for fantastic

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[43]Albert Camus, *Carnets 1935-1942*, p.32.

[44]Jean-Paul Sartre, '"Aminadab", Or the Fantastic Considered as a Language',

prose highlights everyday horror. Such a repositioning of concern, this literature devoted to an articulation of the everyday, impacts upon novelistic plotting. In an often quoted segment of his interview with Kirsty McNeill, Kelman writes

> I think the most ordinary person's life is fairly dramatic; all you've got to do is follow some people around and look at their existence for 24 hours, and it will be horror. It will just be horror. [...] All you have to do is show this one day in maybe this person's life and it'll be horror. [...] There's no need to be saying or thinking "When's the murder or bank robbery going to happen?". No such abnormal event will occur - the kind of events that seems to motivate almost all mainstream fiction whether in book or screen form. In reality these events are abnormal. The whole idea of the big dramatic event, of what constitutes 'plot', only assumes that economic security exists. The way that literature generally works in our society you never have to worry about these very routine horrors, the things that make up the everyday reality for such an enormous proportion of the population. In the Anglo American literary tradition there's almost no concrete reality, no economic detail. All kinds of abnormal events and dramatic plots are required, there's got to be folk appearing out of closets, long lost sisters and brothers, a father who's a murderer, all that sort of junk. (9)

Several things arise here. The notion of routine horror is clearly important but does not constitute as Roderick Watson argues, a reference to Conrad: "There are echoes here of Mr Kurtz's last words [...] and I don't think that they are accidental. Kelman's point would be that you don't need to evoke Conrad's metaphysical fascination with the heart of some dark "other" to see over the edge."[45] You do not need to evoke Conrad at all. Watson forgets that Kelman, following Achebe, is highly critical of Conrad's prose. A more likely source, if one is required, is Wittgenstein: "The horrors of hell can be experienced within a single day; that's plenty of time."[46] For Kelman, Wittgenstein is required reading for all literary artists[47]. Now this might seem a

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Literary Essays, p. 57

[45]Roderick Watson, 'The Rage of Caliban: The "Unacceptable" Face and the "Unspeakable" Voice in Contemporary Scottish Writing', in eds. Horst W Drescher and Susanne Hagemann, *Scotland to Slovenia*, Scottish Studies 21 (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 53-69, p.56.

[46]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, amended edn., ed. G H von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.26e.

[47]Maya Jaggi, 'Speaking in Tongues', *The Guardian*, Weekend Section, July 18 1998, pp.26-30, p.30.

surprising claim for an existential novelist, but Kelman is referring to specific aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, in particular, the opening of the *Tractatus*. "The world is all that is the case. [...] The world is the totality of facts, not of things. [...] What is the case - a fact - is the existence of states of affairs."[48] Wittgenstein's thought displays here an affinity with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. "Whenever Dasein is, it is as a Fact". (*BT* 82) What appeals to Kelman then is not so much Wittgenstein's logical atomism, but the concretion which penetrates and permeates his philosophical writing. Plot and situation have then no need for extravagance or convolution for the everyday provides enough material of philosophical and literary importance. Cairns Craig has drawn a parallel between Kelman and Virginia Woolf, seeing in the former an alignment with the modernist aesthetic of the latter. "Kelman might be said to be fulfilling Virginia Woolf's assertion that the novel ought to examine 'an ordinary mind on an ordinary day'" ('Resisting Arrest', 104)) and Patrick Doyle seems to hint at this when he describes "The halo around the streetlamp". (*D* 83) What is relevant however is that Woolf's programme, the examination of an ordinary mind on an ordinary day, is amenable to an existentialised conception of literary art. Existential fiction seeks the philosophical in the ordinary. Thus far, we have described 'Being-in', one aspect of the ordinary, but the notion of 'world' requires some elaboration

THE LOCAL

Sartre writes that "*Being situated* is an essential and necessary characteristic of freedom." (*WIL* 112) and we have seen that for an existentialist being is always being *there*, being occupies a specific world and the interplay between self and world produces being's 'situation'. Correspondingly, existential literature is, as Hazel Barnes states a "literature- in-situation"[49]. Situation is both what conditions, limits, and enables freedom, but whilst it is necessary that being be situated, the precise situation is merely sufficient, or contingent. Being has to take place some*where*, but the where itself is always only contingent.

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[48]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922, trans. D F Pears and B F McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1993), p.5.
[49]Hazel Barnes, *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* (London: Tavistock, 1961), p. 374.

I was born and bred in Glasgow
I have lived most of my life in Glasgow
It is the place I know best
My language is English
I write
In my writings the accent is in Glasgow
I am always from Glasgow and I speak English always
Always with this Glasgow accent

This is right enough (*TGW* 51)

Kelman's autobiographical foreword to the stories collected in *Three Glasgow Writers* needs to be read carefully for it contains two important and interlocking existential points. The first is a commitment to an aesthetic premised upon an existentialised notion of locality which, and this is the second, simultaneously effects a corresponding movement away from the national and the nationalist. As Drew Milne notes in one of the most perspicacious analyses of Kelman's work,

> Implicit in this [foreword] is a rejection of a Scottish or nationalist mode of address, and hence a critical speech-writing relation to English and a geographical focus on and in Glasgow. The city rather than region or nation is the key analytic category.[50]

All of Kelman's novels are set in Glasgow and therefore what Milne sees as a rejection of Scottish or nationalist modes is accurate, but a minor modification is necessary for these categories are replaced not by 'the city', but by the local: it so happens that on occasion, the local *is* the city. Kelman's novels are set in Glasgow, but many of his short stories are situated in unidentified places, or London, or the Channel Islands. Glasgow supplies *an* accent; it supplies *a* city, but crucially not *the* city, nor *the* accent. As Kelman reminds us "it should be kept in mind that Glasgow

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[50]Drew Milne, 'James Kelman: Dialectics of Urbanity', *Writing Region and Nation: Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, eds. James A Davies et. al. (Swansea: University of Wales, 1994), pp. 393-407. This view of Kelman as localist is also articulated by Simon Baker. See his 'Wee Stories with a Working-Class Theme' in ed. Susanne Hagemann, *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 235-50, p. 238.

can be any other town or city in Great Britain" (*SRA* 80). Consequentially although Kelman writes Glasgow, he should not be taken as a Glasgow writer.

> Glasgow just happens to be the city that I was born within [...] I could have been born anywhere I suppose. And wherever that chanced to be would have been equally unimportant or important (*SRA* 78)

> the fact is I was born and bred in Glasgow ... to some extent where you're born, well, that's an accident - it so happens I was born in the city of Glasgow so I'm a Glaswegian writer. I don't feel any particular responsibility from being from Glasgow ... I could have been born anywhere. Anyway ... there's all these different cultural experiences here so the culture of Glasgow is really rich and varied, it contains many, many different cultures, a great many different ones, so there is no such thing as the "Glasgow writer" in that sense. There are only writers who live and work in Glasgow". ('K is for culture', 26.)

Contingency permeates these quotations but there also lingers an existentially inspired mistrust of description. Kelman only extends himself the term "Glaswegian writer" provided it is understood solely as an indicator of birthplace. To name someone a 'Glasgow writer', rather than a 'writer from Glasgow', implies that there is something necessary or essential about their city or place of birth and as a consequence a certain mode or theme of fiction is therefore sure to follow and critical attempts to formulate a 'Glasgow school' linking Kelman, Galloway, Gray and Lochhead tend to miss this. As H Gustav Klaus recognises, Kelman's writing is no more simply about Glasgow than Joyce's is about Dublin[51]. The central point here then is not that Kelman offers us Glasgow, he offers us *a* Glasgow, there are many different and differing Glasgows. Kelman only offers a perspectival account, as is shown in *A Chancer* when Tammas sets out to find Vi: "The south side of the city was unfamiliar to him. Aside from the name of the main road he recognised nothing." (*C* 141) Glasgow is not then a *Kulturprovinz*, in the sense that it is the site of a single unitary culture. What Glasgow is depends upon the position, the perspective, of the viewer. Kelman only offers us a particular account of Glasgow. Yet even this is not focused or honed enough.

> If you happen to be a Scotsman in a Scottish pub and you get talking to another Scottish man and you ask where he comes form you don't

[51]H Gustav Klaus, 'Kelman for Beginners', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, no. 22 (Summer 1994), 127-135, p.128.

> expect him to say 'Scotland', you expect him to say 'Glasgow' or 'Edinburgh' or 'Inverness'. And if you're a Glasgow woman in a Glasgow pub and you meet another Glasgow woman and you ask where she's from you expect her to say 'Partick', or 'the Calton', or 'Easterhouse' or whatever. And if you're a Dennistoun man in a Dennistoun pub and you meet another Dennistoun man and you ask where he comes form you don't expect him to say 'Dennistoun', you expect him to say 'round the corner' or 'Alexandra Parade' or 'Onslow Drive' etc. ('Oppression and Solidarity', *SRA* 72-3)

As Tom Leonard argues, literature should "set out from what is within sight and touch"[52] and it is only the immediately local which can be seen, heard or touched. Locality is the precise 'where', the time and the place, in which an individual is contingently situated. Thus both those who come to praise and those who come to bury Kelman for misrepresenting *Scotland*[53] rather miss the point, for no individual self can ever contact with a country, for all that can ever be experienced is a perspective of a fragment, a perspective upon a locality. No individual can ever *mis*represent Scotland for the simple reason that no individual can ever represent Scotland, since Scotland, or for that matter England, Wales, Germany, Dennistoun, or wherever, as a totality is not amenable to individual representation, for there is simply no concrete vantage point from where this representation might be conducted. An individual cannot, as it were, remove him or herself from a particular view of a particular locality and insert themselves into the national.

This concern with the local, with that which is around the observer, has then clear phenomenological precedents, but it seems to indicate too why Kelman and Tom Leonard value the work of Charles Olson and William Carlos Williams. In his autobiography, Williams praises Olson for his commitment to a poetry which founds itself upon the concrete, and in a key passage Williams reveals a source for his own poetical thinking. The poet's business is not

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[52]Tom Leonard, 'Poetry, Schools, Place' in *Reports from the Present: Selected Work 1982-94* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 21-9, p.26.

[53]Allan Massie for example. "What [Kelman] has offered is a slice of Scottish culture, but it's by no means the whole thing". Quoted in Stuart Wavell, 'Scots bewail 4,000-expletive blot on the national character', *Sunday Times*, 16 October 1994, p.3.

> to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal. John Dewey had said (I discovered it quite by chance), "The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds."[54]

Well almost all art. For Kelman and for Leonard, good art, valuable art, builds upon the local for the local is the sole situation of the existential. Dewey's essay, 'Americanism and Localism' has distinct existential affinities, and it is important here because it helps centre Kelman's localism within an existential dynamic.

> the earth is just what it used to be. It is a loose collection of houses, of streets, of neighbourhoods, villages, farms, towns. Each of these has an intense consciousness of what is going on within itself in the way of fires, burglaries, murders, family jars, weddings, and banquets to esteemed fellow citizens, and a languid drooping interest in the rest of the spacious land. Very provincial? Not at all. Just local, just human, just at home, just where they live.[55]

Dewey develops a pragmatist cleavage between the national - the American - and the local. These concerns, fires, burglaries and so on, are those which affect people where they are. They are rooted, real, near at hand. For Dewey, people are "chiefly concerned with what goes on in their tenement house, their alley, their factory, their street." (ibid., 13). This is not, as Dewey points out, parochial, it is existential, it is a focus upon the living and the concrete actual.

An individual does not live then in a nation, instead he or she lives in a particular locality and this locality is both concrete and contingent. As Dewey states, the only things that are national "are the high cost of living, prohibition [the essay was written in the 1920s] and a devotion to localisms". The national or the nation, "is something that exists in Washington and other seats of government." Thus if Kelman rejects nationalist modes of address it is precisely because, as Dewey suggests, 'Nation' is an ontologically unrobust category: nation is simply an abstraction useful for general discussion, it has no ontological basis, it is one of the "vague categories" to which Williams refers. Therefore when Kelman speaks of culture, he means *local* culture,

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[54]William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p.391.

[55]John Dewey, 'Americanism and Localism', *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp.12-16, p.12.

the culture that a situated 'I' meets in and through the day-to-day. Culture is a matter of proximity, or in the case of reading or listening to music, of experiential contact. It is then both an epistemological and ontological impossibility to experience a nation and thus Kelman concludes that there are no such *entities* as national cultures.

> we have to be clear about what we *don't* mean when we talk in these terms: we don't mean some kind of 'pure, native-born Scottish person' or some mystical 'national culture'. Neither of these entities has ever existed in the past and cannot conceivably exist in the future. Even when arguments involving these concepts are 'rational', they can only be conducted on some higher plane. And it's always safer for human beings - as opposed to concepts or machines - when this higher plane is restricted to mathematics, theoretical physics or logic [...] The logic of this 'higher plane' seems forced to generate a never-ending stream of conceptual purity to do with sets and the sets of sets; and the sets of the sets of the sets of sets; and the set of the sets of the sets of all sets. Entities like 'Scotsman', 'German', 'Indian' or 'American'; 'Scottish culture', 'Jamaican culture', 'African culture', or 'Asian culture' are material absurdities. They aren't particular things in the world. There are no material bodies that correspond to them. We only used those terms [sic] in the way we use other terms such as 'tree', 'bird', 'vehicle' or 'red'. They define abstract concepts; 'things' that don't exist other than for loose classification. ('Oppression and Solidarity', *SRA* 72)

The pertinent term here is 'material absurdities'. Language is structured such that individual articulators frequently used general terms, but the existence of a noun does not entail that there exists a corresponding *entity*. Nation is precisely such a concept. Here it is important to disentangle Kelman from a recent intellectual trend exemplified and articulated by both Roderick Watson and Robert Crawford[56] in which talk of 'Scotland' is replaced by talk of 'Scotlands'. This though is merely a multiplication of an initial error. Berthold Schoene-Harwood writes:

> The seemingly ingenious critical manoeuvre of Scottish intellectuals simply to replace monolithic SCOTLAND with the more pluralistic notion of SCOTLANDS bears its own ideological quandary. While

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[56]Roderick Watson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Reflections after Bakhtin on the Scots Literary Tradition and Contemporary Writing' in ed. Alastair Renfrew, *Exploiting Bakhtin*, Strathclyde Modern Language Studies, New Series, no 2 (1997) 1-14. Robert Crawford, 'Dedefining Scotland' in ed. Susan Basnett, *Studying British Culture: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 83-96.

> ostensibly acknowledging and even promoting cultural diversity, it is - like the older label - still a territorial, historically pre-encoded and hence potentially essentialist term which serves to identify, isolate and exclude both internal and external 'aliens' by clearly distinguishing what is Scottish from what is un-Scottish. [...]what the term SCOTLANDS appears to promote resembles an only less nationalistically inspired, territorially defined and culturally subsumptive straitjacket of communal homogeneity.[57]

Essentialist straitjackets are not of course what an existentialist would wish to don.

Kelman's fictions then, proceeding from an existentially inspired construction of locality and situation disassociate themselves form the parameters of the national. In so doing, Kelman also effects a separation between his own prose and previous Glasgow texts with which one might be tempted to place his work; in particular Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place*. In Hind's novel, the narrator Mat Craig struggles to extricate himself from his culture via the salvation of art. Moreover, in a well known passage, Mat Craig laments the absence of *local* subject matter for his proposed novel.

> A whole background against which the drama and seriousness of life could be played out was missing from their lives. All the background against which a novelist might set his scene, the aberrant attempts of human beings and societies to respond to circumstances, all that was bizarre, grotesque and extravagant in human life, all that whole background of violence, activity, intellectual and imaginative ardour, political daring. All that was somehow missing from Scottish life. In lieu of all this artistic and human extravagance, all the menace, violence and horror which had been the experience of so many European writers, in Scottish life there was only a null blot, a cessation of life, a dull absence, a blankness and diminution and weakening of all the fibres of being, of buildings not blown up but crumbling and rotten, of streets not running with blood or rivers of fists but with wan puddles, a withering of existence, no agony of living[58]

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[57]Berthold Schoene-Harwood, ''Emerging as the others of our selves' - Scottish multiculturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation', *Scottish Literary Journal*, vol 25, no 1 (May 1998), 54-72, p.55, p.56. Movement away from the national is also usefully discussed in Gordon MacLeod, 'In what sense a region? Place hybridity, symbolic shape, and institutional formation in (post-) modern Scotland', *Political Geography*, vol 17, no 7 (1998) 833-863.

[58]Archie Hind, *A Dear Green Place*, 1966 (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1984), p.83.

Kelman would recognise and accept the need to source fictional models outwith Scotland, but as I have argued above this is done in order to articulate the local. For Mat Craig, it is not simply that technical accomplishments have to be sought abroad, the implication is that subject matter too has to be found elsewhere. Even with imported techniques, there is nothing of sufficient interest to which these devices can be employed to relate. The revision of this weary hypothesis is one of Kelman's predominant achievements. Like many writers he has to look beyond his own shores for fictional techniques, but like Tom Leonard, this is to better articulate the near at hand, the native culture within which he operates. Whilst Craig complains of an absence of horror, an absence of intelligence, Kelman consistently shows that such absence is imagined. Real terrors inhabit every locality, their disclosure merely requires attunement to the existential.

NARRATIVE

The preceding considerations bring us now to the question of narrative, for successful articulation of the existential themes which we have examined above requires a particular distillation into narrative form. Given that some issues relate to specific texts, for instance Kelman's utilisation of some of the techniques associated with the *nouveau roman* in *A Chancer*, I postpone more specific discussion of these until the relevant chapter. We can however begin with several general points. Firstly, treating Kelman as an existentialist encourages a reappraisal of a critical commonplace - that Kelman's much discussed narrative mode represents a solution to a problem posed by Walter Scott: how to accommodate Scottish speech patterns within the language of the English.[59] Again the Scottish/English dualism is called upon to perform but again it need not be accepted. For Kelman, the problem is not how to un-English the language of supposed imperialist aggressors; it is not how to place demotic Scots within standard English - remember that Kelman writes an accented English, "My language is English [...] I speak English always/ Always with this Glasgow accent" - it is rather how to decontaminate language, how to divest it of the anti-existential, in

[59]This is Cairns Craig's position. See his 'James Kelman' in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol 194, *British Novelists Since 1960*, ed Merritt Moseley (London: Gale, 1988), pp. 166-174, p.170 and his *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.103.

order that it might better represent the existential. If Kelman's prose style coincidentally solves a problem for cultural nationalists then this is simply an epiphenomenon, not the principal motivation. Kelman's central narrative task is how to render prose value-free. This requires some elaboration.

Kelman's now distinct narrative style did not emerge fully-formed, but it nevertheless evolves quickly. Although the constants of character - the marginalised and excluded individual male - and setting - the everyday - are present at the outset, of the thirteen stories collected in *An Old Pub Near the Angel*, twelve feature bound direct speech. Even within this atypical form, there is a gradual evolution from the first piece 'The Cards' to the wholly phonetic 'Nice to be Nice' in which speech markers are entirely absent. 'The Cards' noticeably and uncharacteristically employs an omniscient narrator, and features literary ornament, adverbs and adjectives, which Kelman's later prose either greatly reduces or dispenses with entirely. Taken as a whole, the collection begins with an omniscient position and ends with first person stream-of-consciousness. Kelman never returns to either technique. Phoneticism he abandons because he thought Tom Leonard a better practitioner of the form; omniscience is rejected because it positions the narrator *sub specie aeternitatis*, effectively out of the world; and stream-of-consciouness, at least in the familiar Joycean manner, is excluded because it does not permit the immanence and solidarity, the factical rootedness, which are central components of Kelman's mature narrative style.

These points require some elaboration for they all depend upon an underlying commitment to freedom. The refusal of an omniscient position functions analogically in that it corresponds to the atheistic existential position of an absent God. An omniscient author would suggest that there is an ultimate orderer of character possibility, whereas an existential text needs to show that possibility exists solely in the realms of the human, within the actor himself. Character is not precast, but rather mutable, able to change through its own volition. Even within a theistic existential framework, the use of omniscience is still problematic for as Kierkegaard writes "God can be the only spectator of world history. Human beings are supposed to be

actors."[60] Again this is why Kelman declines what have become postmodernist tropes, in particular prolepses. An existential text cannot use prolepsis because the implication is that there is a position over and above that of the character in his or her situation: prolepsis entails a foreteller, a foreseer. Freedom would then be illusory because everything within the narrative would be already determined.

> Since we were *situated*, the only novels we could dream of were novels of *situation*, without internal narrators or all-knowing witnesses. In short, if we wished to give an account of our age, we had to make the technique of the novel shift from Newtonian mechanics to generalised relativity; we had to people our books with minds that were half lucid and half overcast, some of which we might consider with more sympathy than others, but none of which would have a privileged point of view either upon the event or upon itself [...] we had to leave doubts, expectations, and the unachieved throughout our works [...]. (*WIL* 166)

For Sartre, situation - concretion and rootedness of setting - demands an equivalent in the writing itself and this is linked to the evasion of determinism discussed above. Kelman adopts these Sartrean moves and consequently within his texts sentence structure and lexical selection display an ideational function which is basically phenomenological/existential. In Kelman's prose, narrative describes but it does not explain or deduce. Nor does it move from the descriptive 'is' to a didactic 'ought'. The task of an existential narrative is to display the concrete union of being and world but this necessarily involves the displayal of gaps and ambiguities. Being as Sartre conceives it always preserves "a certain indetermination, a certain unpredictability" (*BN* 262) since it is a process, being continually made and remade. Within an existential novel, style tends to mimic the becoming of the existential subject. To do so, Sartre, following Heidegger, depicts consciousness not as knowing or reflecting, but as acting, living. As Sartre points out, the traditional novel is structured through a combination of being and having; the existential novel through a combination of doing and being. (*WIL* 174)

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[60]Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol 1, 1846, ed. and trans. Howard V Hong and Edna V Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.158.

Kelman suggests this through narrative temporality, for in the novels narrative time is always now and this allows the reader to see life in the present tense, as it is being lived. This presentness enables the existential idea of the present subject moving out and creating, reaching into the future. Kelman's novels are active, all four open with the detailing of a present tense activity, immediately suggesting that character is being made as we read.

> The novels of our elders related the event as having taken place in the past. Chronological order permitted the reader to see the logical and universal relationship, the eternal verities. The slightest change was already understood. A past was delivered to us which had already been thought through. [...] We were convinced that no art could really be ours if it did not restore to the event its brutal freshness, its ambiguity, its unforseeability. (*WIL* 167)

As Sartre argues, a past-tense form would give us a life already lived, it would be converted from the existential to the essential, whereas if the narrative is happening in 'now-time', then it is being presented as an *actual* state of affairs, the act and the actor exist, constitute an undeniable 'fact'. The description and depiction of undeniable concrete facts are what make Kelman's narratives political, something shared with the work of Tom Leonard:

> It's that area of present-time consciousness that writers like Beckett and Graham give to their personae; and the personae in turn pass it on to the reader. It's a very political thing to do, since it seems to assume that the only - and equal - value that can be placed on any human being is in the fact that the human being actually exists.[61]

Kelman's narratives are descriptive but description as intended here needs to be carefully qualified, for it is an existential/phenomenological method. It describes without explaining, uniting or connecting and therefore leaves those gaps and ambiguities which Sartre discusses. In this way, Kelman's narrative method is noteworthy not so much for what it includes as what it excludes and as well as pointing to philosophical existentialism, this technique refers us to Kelman's reading of Kafka.

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[61]Tom Leonard, 'On Reclaiming the Local and The Theory of the Magic Thing', *Edinburgh Review*, no. 77 (1987), 40-47, p.45.

> one thing you can notice in Franz Kafka's work, most particularly in his use of third party narrative, he doesn't necessarily detail a thing that exists. What he often does is refer to a space which he then fills with a crowd of things that either don't exist, or maybe don't exist. He fills the page with absences and possible absences, possible realities. Who is that woman! She isn't my wife. She isn't my fiancee. And she isn't my girlfriend. Nor my sister. She isn't my grannie nor yet my mother. And she probably isn't my auntie and I doubt if she's my cousin. Who is she? She isn't my neighbour. She maybe isn't someone I know at all. Probably she's a stranger. [...] In talking about this technique critically you could use the terms 'negative apprehension' and 'the subjunctive mood'. [...] when you work your way through every absence you can think of you'll be left with a particular, something concrete; and this is usually where you discover the finest art, or at least the most satisfactory. ('Artists and Value', *SRA* 6-7)

"They were not particularly heavy, nor particularly bulky." (*D* 2) The description of Patrick Doyle's pipes illustrates this negative method: if they are not heavy then what are they? Light? Medium heavy? If not bulky then what? Of greater significance however is Kelman's use of this method to depict *character*, for in Kelman's novels, no protagonist is physically described. Using Sartre's typification, Kelman's characters lack 'having', lack fixed essential properties, and are shown only in their 'being' and their 'doing', their existing. Character therefore emerges as a not, a lack, and thus the fictional practice of Kafka and Kelman advances a key tenet of Sartrean ontology.

There are other existentially significant absences in Kelman's texts and these are explicable by reference to a number of fictional and philosophical sources. As Camus utilises Hemingway in the production of a pared down prose, so Kelman too eschews literary ostentation. Again there is a Wittgensteinian undercurrent for the latter values an "unpoetic mentality, which heads straight for the concrete."[62] Wittgenstein's thought can be read as a philosophical translation of Alfred Loos' architectural principle that all ornament is crime and Kelman evidences an anti-ornamental aesthetic attitude in both his advice to Jeff Torrington and Agnes Owens. Alasdair Gray records in his endnotes to *Three Glasgow Writers* that Owens "sometimes used too many

[62]Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p.6e.

adverbs, and Jim Kelman had been unremitting in his efforts to make her like Chekhov more and Graham Greene less" (*TGW* 284). Philip Hobsbaum recalls that "Torrington told me that when he first attended one of Kelman's writing groups in Paisley Kelman suggested that he knock all of the stained glass windows out of his prose, referring to the adjectives and adverbs."[63] Ornamentation occasions a distortion, a muddying of the concrete. Furthermore adjectives limit, qualify and are ultimately subsidiary to the existent itself, to the noun. However, in order to maintain the concrete and the specific, a further purge is required.

> Sort through the clumsiness and carelessness; the clichés, the shopsoiled phrases, the timeworn description; basic technical stuff. What it usually signifies is a straightforward lack of interest in, or awareness of, particulars. They don't reach the concrete. They seem content to give a general idea of something. Big handsome men and slender beautiful women will always be seen as that no matter who does the looking. And by quick extension of that: Everybody on the broo is lazy. Jews are greedy. Black people are criminals. Red haired people are bad tempered. Irish people are ignorant. Peasants are hamfisted. Glaswegian working class males are drunken wife-beaters. What is a cliché really but a conventional way of looking, a conventional way of perceiving. [...] Instead of thinking or judging for themselves they're relying on conventional wisdom, received opinion, the everyday values of society. ('Artists and Value', *SRA* 9)

Cliché is expunged because it moves among the general to the neglect of the existential particular. If as Kelman states, such conventional images dominate the English literary canon, then the task of the writer is to resist cliché by removing from narrative the descriptive means through which cliché is permitted to emerge. Rejection of cliché is supplemented by a rejection of other rhetorical devices such as simile and metaphor. This explains Kelman's interest in the Black Mountain poets, in particular Charles Olson. In his essay 'Projective Verse'[64], Olson develops an influential statement of modern poetics which links content to form, focuses upon voice, sees poetry as activity and urges an excision of certain rhetorical devices: "Simile is only one bird who comes down, too easily. The descriptive functions

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[63]Peter Kravitz, 'Introduction', *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1997), pp.xi-xxxvi, p. xvii.

[64]Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse' in ed. Donald M Allen, *The New American Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp.386-397.

generally have to be watched" (390). Olson advocates an objectivism wherein the poem needs

> to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego. (395)

To avoid lyrical interference Kelman cannot pair away the author to leave a stream-of-consciousness narrative. David Lodge, chairman of the 1989 Booker judges sees *A Disaffection* as formally unadventurous, written in "a mixture of interior monologue and free indirect style, rather like the early chapters of *Ulysses*". He contends that the novel "challenges the reader primarily by its content and use of Glaswegian dialect, not by its narrative form."[65] Here Lodge underestimates and slightly misunderstands Kelman for the challenge as we have seen *is* in the narrative form. A pivotal aspect of Kelman's narrative technique which Lodge misses is that it situated within a particular circumstance and also precisely because it does not use unadulterated interior monologue, it evinces a solidarity with that particular circumstance. A purely first person narrative stands alone: but also it entails that the author has access to the mind of the protagonist or is able to control and determine what issues from it. Kelman's sophisticated commingling of third person and singular narrative forms manages to keep experience relative to an individual perceiver: his novels never transcend the viewpoint of the principal character; choosing to stick with rather than preside over.

What Kelman's aesthetic amounts to is this: a twofold conception of the existential. A resolutely non-national corpus which insists upon the validity of its form and its content. The novels are however dialogic, they both engage with and supplement the tradition of existential writing, but they always maintain a conversation with an existential tradition. Thus far we have examined facets of Kelman's prose. The purpose of this chapter has been to redefine the exegetical nomenclature with which the critic might better approach Kelman's prose. In the next chapter, I consider four

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[65]David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing* (New York: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1996), pp.10-11.

pivotal existential works, assessing each in terms of technique and content. I do this in order to effect a literary and philosophical prism through which to read Kelman's novels but additionally, to make present those texts with which his own novels converse.

Chapter Two

The Existential Tradition.

The immorality of our age is perhaps not lust and pleasure and sensuality, but rather a pantheistic, debauched contempt for individual human beings.
Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[1]

The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become.
Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.[2]

The world is not what I think, but what I live through.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.[3]

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[1]Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.355.
[2]Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1984, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.221.
[3]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. xvi-xvii.

Having outlined Kelman's aesthetic, this chapter concerns itself with the formation of the existential tradition. I need this grounding because in subsequent chapters, I shall be applying aspects of the existentialist procedures and themes brought out here to the reading of particular Kelman texts. This preliminary chapter is a necessary sketch since it both enables and supports the detailed readings which follow.

DOSTOEVSKY

Notes from Underground

If the genre of existentialist fiction exists then Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*[4] is in many ways its inaugural text. Although antecedent works disclose existential themes or existentially appropriable methods - Dostoevsky reminds us that he emerges from under Gogol's 'Overcoat' - *Notes from Underground* effects a unique and influential synthesis. Here, what can be read as existential issues not only appear, but predominate.

There are several stylistic and content-related features which combine to make *Notes from Underground* a seminal existential text. It is a critical commonplace that throughout his work, Dostoevsky is concerned with individual psychology, and with the contemporary individual, rather than with general sociology, and as with his contemporary Baudelaire and his precursor Gogol, Dostoevsky's fiction is metrocentric: the city becomes the factical given in which the individual is found. Locating his texts within St. Petersburg, the city which the underground man terms "the most abstract and intentional" (*NU* 17), occasions an investigation into the alienation and anxiety engendered by life in a modern Western metropolis. The resulting critique of the modern city is allied to a pervasive *scepsis* regarding the intellectual orthodoxies (utilitarianism, determinism, Darwinism, Hegelianism, ethical egoism, Utopian socialism) of the time. Furthermore, the *artistic* orthodoxies of Romanticism and naturalism are also subject to scrutiny within an overall examination of the art/life dualism.

These matters occur at a thematic level. Formally, the text dispenses with the traditional *telos* of Aristotelian beginning-middle-end narrative, and is instead

[4]Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground/The Double*, 1864, 1846, trans. Jessie Coulson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). Hereafter *NU*.

constructed through divagations, underminings and hesitations, 'concluding' with an arbitrary and sudden ending - an ending moreover which in no sense supplies narrative closure. In common with Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the novel uses an editor, pointing forward to Sartre's *Nausea*, but also demonstrating precisely that means of removing the author from the text which Kelman sees as a distinctly existential strategy. Significantly, *Notes from Underground* is written in Russian, which at the time of the novel's composition was still a nascent literary language. Previously spoken only by peasants, Post-Pushkin, the use of the Russian language in constructing fiction becomes a political act[5]. The use of the language of the working classes also reflects the general proclivity of existentialist fiction to deal with the common rather than the exceptional man: existential fiction becomes 'low'-mimetic. "I am proud that I was the first to depict the real man of the Russian majority and the first to expose his disfigured and tragic side".[6] Throughout his work Dostoevsky seeks to reconnect literature and the experience of the common man, the neglected and the marginalised. These compositional and thematic features combine to produce an enormously influential anti-novel, an avatar of much European twentieth-century fiction: its influence detectable in all the texts examined below.

Dostoevsky's text foregrounds then certain fictional strategies which support, exemplify or portend what we might term existentialist positions. The concern with a particular individual immediately distances Dostoevsky from the more panoramic

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[5] D S Mirsky discusses the evolution of literary Russian in his *A History of Russian Literature*. In particular, he foregrounds the importance of Mikháylo Vasílievich Lomonósov (1711 - 1765) and Nikoláy Mikháylovich Karamazín (1766- 1826) in the formulation of the literary language. For Mirsky, Karamazín was of singular importance. Although his linguistic reforms were described as "anti-democratic", and "anti-national", as Mirsky notes, "the ultimate justification of Karamazín's language is that it became the language of Pushkín."
D.S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, ed. Francis J Whitfield (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p.60.
Lionel Kochan in his *The Making of Modern Russia* places a greater emphasis upon the input of Lomonosov. *The Making of Modern Russia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.134.

[6]Dostoevsky quoted in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958), p.28.

socio-historical fiction of Scott, Tolstoy or Dickens and it is this affirmation of individual experience that links Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard[7]. In *Notes from Underground*, the desire to disclose the myriad sensations, the problematics, of an individual consciousness necessitates the employment of a first person narrator. As a philosophy of the subject, existentialism seems to demand that the novel become reliant upon either first-person narrators, or narrative modes designed to situate the reader within or beside a particular character's consciousness. The opening paragraph of Dostoevsky's novel signals such a movement within.

> I am a sick man ... I am an angry man. I am an unattractive man. I think there is something wrong with my liver. But I don't understand the least thing about my illness, and I don't know for certain what part of me is affected. (*NU* 15)

The reader encounters a first person narrative where the compressed sentences provide a syntactic facsimile of the narrator's consciousness, entrammelled within its "mouse hole". This segment also discloses that the narrator is a "sick man ... an angry man", an indication to the reader that the character to be encountered herein is an anti-hero - but moreover an anti-hero with a precarious ontology: he is "sick", but is unaware of what it is that is ailing him. The immediate concern with an individual 'I' (part one of the novel begins with "I" and ends with "self") also facilitates a highlighting of the gap between the social self and the private self. Literary modernism tends to foreground the alienation to which an individual is subject within the modern city. A key component of existentialist philosophies, alienation and estrangement become crucial thematics as much for the existential novelist as the existentialist philosopher *qua* philosopher. In Kafka, Camus, Sartre, and Kelman, alienation - be it from world, self, or language - is a persistent area of exploration.

At both the level of form and the level of content, *Notes from Underground* refuses a fixed and total position. Its very title, "Notes", suggests a discontinuous, fragmented, narrative. In terms of narration the seeming disparity between parts one and two, the random ending, the narrative voice which continually unworks and revises its pronouncements, are all techniques more familiar to readers of Beckett's *Trilogy*.

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[7]*Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature*, p.13.

Within Dostoevsky's text however such mechanisms serve to underscore the protean nature of the work: nothing is finished, there is no ultimate textual *telos* for meaning is continually made and unmade. This fluidity indicates what Bakhtin famously describes as polyphony:

> *A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels.* What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.[8]

Bakhtin, though not himself an existentialist, is useful here because what he picks out can nevertheless be translated into existential terms. The idea that individual being has a corresponding individual world, and thus there is no objective non-situated position is clearly existential and so too the idea that consciousness is not unified and is characterised by a plurality and that such plurality has validity. This polyphony is a common feature of the existentialist text where the apparent disorder of form imbues the narrative with a 'lived' quality. In Kierkegaardian terms, the living, acting human being is always incomplete. Life is lived constantly forwards and there is therefore never a particular moment in which an individual can disengage from living and find a vantage point to enable comprehension of his life. In addition, the competing voices of the protagonist whilst immediately revelatory of the ontological precariousness of a particular being-in-the-world, simultaneously elicit a kind of hermeneutic uncertainty in the reader. This facet of *Notes from Underground* is, as we shall shortly see, developed more fully by Kafka. *The Trial* in particular produces interpretative doubt because Kafka's fiction operates fundamentally at a parabolic or allegorical level and ultimately it is left up to the reader to *choose* what the text is a parable of. In such a way therefore, the text avoids becoming a receptacle for any one totalised system of meaning. Such ambiguity is a common feature of the existentialist novel, which like

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[8]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.6.

existential philosophy militates against the clear and distinct ideas of Cartesian Rationalism[9].

Existentialism in its stressing of choice and freedom over the systematic and the determined can be seen as a challenge to the novelist. The chaotic configuration of *Notes from Underground* is thus both a means of registering the flux of an individual consciousness, but in addition a means of introducing an element of freedom at a formal level: the polyphony of competing voices can be seen as the competing choices, a host of possible selves, with which the narrator is faced. Furthermore, the use of a first person narrator precludes the involvement of an authorial 'God'. Within Dostoevsky's novel, the author/editor disappears into the background, intruding only twice; once at the outset, once at the end. It may be objected that notions of freedom are incommensurable with the systematicity required by syntax but an existentialist novelist would not have a problem with this. Freedom as existentialists conceive it is not a total freedom; language and its structure can therefore be seen as constitutive of a certain facticity for the novelist: one is born, or thrown into a language. In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard speaks of language as

> being partly something originally given, partly that which develops freely. And just as the individual, however freely he may develop, can never reach the point at which he becomes absolutely independent, since true freedom on the contrary consists rather in freely appropriating that which is given [...] so too with language.[10]

This refusal to accept and utilise a coherent progressive and systematic means of narration can be seen as contiguous with an existential refusal to accept those ideological or philosophical systems which attempt to totalise and comprehend individual human experience. Existentialism, beginning with Kierkegaard and as developed by Nietzsche, interrogates the attempts of philosophy (in particular as practised by Hegel/Hegelians) and nineteenth century science[11], to develop an all

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[9]See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1641, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.30 and passim.
[10]Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), §323, p.82. Hereafter *J.*
[11] For an account of Nietzsche as existentialist see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

embracing system of objective truth. Within the Hegelian dialectic, man is *aufgehoben*, taken up, cancelled or preserved, made into a part within a whole, and for Kierkegaard he or she is thereby reduced to a concept:

> What confuses the whole doctrine about 'being' [...] is that people do not notice that they are always operating with the 'concept' existence. But the *concept* existence is an ideality and the difficulty of course is whether existence can be reduced to a concept [...] existence corresponds to the individual thing, the individual, which even Aristotle teaches lies outside, or at least cannot be reduced to a concept. For an individual animal, plant, or man, existence [...] is of quite decisive importance; an individual man has not after all a conceptual existence. (*J* §1027, pp.357-8)

The system then is an abnegation, an abstraction of this individual man. For Dostoevsky's narrator: "all these beautiful systems - these theories of explaining his best interests to man [...] are, in my opinion, nothing but sophistry" (*NU* 31). Moreover Kierkegaard accuses philosophical system-builders of constructing edifices within which the architect himself does not live:

> In relation to their systems most systematisers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack close by; they do not live in their own enormous systematic buildings. Spiritually speaking a man's thought must be the building in which he lives - otherwise everything is topsy-turvy. (*J*, §583, p.156)

This passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals* finds its fictional correlate in *Notes from Underground*; "perhaps it is only from a distance that he likes the building [...] perhaps he only likes building it, not living in it". (*NU* 40) The Crystal Palace to which the narrator refers is symbolic of the system, the nexus of objective, rationalist, scientific thought: pretty to look at but impossible to live in, for it affords the

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1974), p.89*ff*. This anti-scientism is as much a feature of twentieth-century existentialist thought as it is of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Simone de Beauvoir notes that Sartre "flatly refused to believe in science" going so far as to maintain that "microbes and other animalculae invisible to the naked eye simply didn't exist at all." Quoted in Peter Caws, *Sartre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p.6. Heidegger, though less extreme than Sartre certainly shared his suspicion of the truth claims of (particularly modern) science. In addition Heidegger, is interrogative of the supposed benefits of technology. See his 'Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics', trans. W B Barton Jr., and Vera Deutsch in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.271-305.

individual no freedom, it cannot accommodate the individual as an individual. With possible allusion to *Hamlet*[12], the underground man compares the human subject as constructed by the objective discourses of nineteenth century science and philosophy to an organ stop;

> science will teach men [...] that they have not, in fact, and never have had, either will or fancy, and are no more than a sort of piano keyboard or barrel-organ cylinder; and that the laws of nature still exist on the earth, so that whatever man does he does not of his own volition but, as really goes without saying, by the laws of nature. Consequently, these laws of nature have only to be discovered, and man will no longer be responsible for his actions". (*NU* 32)

Against this determinism the underground man asserts that, our most treasured possession is "our individuality" (*NU* 36) and that a man "should constantly prove to himself that he is a man and not a sprig in a barrel-organ."(*NU* 38) We have here precedents for the existential rejection of behaviourism, the notion that character, an individual, can be predicted or caused:

> since all our volition and all reasoning really may be tabulated, because the laws of our so-called free will may indeed be discovered, it follows, quite seriously, that some sort of table may be drawn up and that we shall exercise our wills in conformity with that table. [...] After all, in that case I can calculate my life for thirty years in advance. (*NU* 35)

Causality, expressed constantly through the formula 'twice two equals four' becomes for the narrator a "wall", a barrier to freedom.

The Hegelian notion of history is further disparaged ; "In short, anything can be said of world history, anything conceivable by the most disordered imagination. There is only one thing that you can't say - that it had anything to do with reason." (*NU* 37) The notion of an ultimate end, movement toward which is ineluctable, is undermined

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[12] From III.ii;

> Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you/ make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem/ to know my stops. You would sound me from my lowest note to/ the top of my compass ... Call me what instrument you will,/ though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.141.

further by the narratal form itself which via its arbitrary ending and authorial footnote - "This is not the end" (*NU* 123) - implies incremental continuity rather than progression. This movement away from teleology is enforced when the narrator declares that the purpose is "in living, and not specifically in the goal".(*NU* 40) The collision here between on the one hand the rational, historical and teleological and on the other the lived, effectively restates the conflict between the conceptual and the subjective, the Kierkegaardian and the Hegelian. Hegelianism, Marxism[13] and nineteenth-century science are all reliant upon a determinism which seems to preclude freewill and choice. Unable to live within the Crystal Palace of determinism, the underground man withdraws inward in an attempt to construct an arena of freedom. The 'diary' which he creates is an attempt to construct such an arena.

If one is determined by objective laws then personal identity becomes a function of the external, objective world. In order then to exercise some degree of freedom, the underground man retreats to a self-constructed internal world. The narrator feels that the only way to achieve autonomy is to pose as a fictional character: "I imagined happenings, I invented a life, so that I should at any rate *live*."(*NU* 26); "Everything always ended happily, however, with a lazy and entrancing transition to art; that is, to beautiful ready-made images of life, forcibly wrenched from poets and novelists and adapted to every possible kind of service and requirement" (*NU* 60) but by so doing he lapses into a mode of inauthenticity. His absorption within fictional modes of existence results in an escape from, rather than an engagement with 'reality'. Hence the irony of his encounter with the prostitute Liza. He tells her that "you have to learn

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[13] In that Marxism includes an epistemic teleology and relies upon either dialectical or historical materialism. Further, dialectical materialism although averse to the notion that the laws which govern matter are in any sense mechanistic, is still dependent upon a fundamentally Hegelian (dialectical), and therefore *conceptual*, notion of history: mankind in any Marxian analysis is subject to certain laws; the historical *telos* being the resolution of class conflict. In a conversation with the Marxist Naville, reproduced at the end of *Existentialism and Humanism*, Sartre identifies Marxist causality as having "no meaning except in Hegel". The causality that Marxism relies upon is "a dream". *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1948, trans. Phillip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1989), pp.68-69. Of course the later Sartre in his *The Problem of Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* attempts a reconciliation between existentialism and Marxism. It is the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* with which this chapter is concerned.

how to live yourself, and after that you can criticise people" (*N* 95) but he does not act upon his own advice. The underground man manages to convince Liza to accept responsibility for her actions, to choose to live authentically, but this is precisely what he himself is unable to do. Authenticity as conceived in existentialist philosophies is bound up with freedom, choice and ultimately action, but the underground man only *talks* and *imagines*: he does not *act* any more than the fictional characters with which he identifies.

Like Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*, the underground man at times conceives of himself as a Nietzschean *Übermensch*:

> I was painfully advanced, as a man of our time should be. But they were dullards, as like one another as a flock of sheep. (*NU* 48)
>
> compared to them I was a fly, a nasty obscene fly - cleverer, better educated, nobler than any of them, that goes without saying - but a fly.(*NU* 55)

All that he can manage however is a "Napoleonic *pose*". (*NU* 113 my italics) Only capable of action within an imaginative world, instead of an overman, Dostoevsky's narrator resembles what Nietzsche terms the 'indignant man';

> For the indignant man, and whoever is continually tearing and rending himself with his teeth (or, instead of himself, the world, or God, or society) may indeed morally speaking stand higher than the laughing and self-satisfied satyr, but in every other sense he is the more commonplace, less interesting, less instructive case. And no one *lies* so much as the indignant man.[14]

The underground man's 'lies' are his auto-fictionalisation; a facet of himself that he recognises when he notes "Heine states that trustworthy autobiographies are almost an impossibility, and that a man will probably never tell the truth about himself." (*NU* 45)

He wants to break out from the 'herd' but cannot;

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[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, 1886, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), §26, p.58.

> Not only couldn't I make myself malevolent, I couldn't make myself anything: neither good nor bad, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect. (*NU* 16)
>
> Either a hero or dirt, there was nothing in between. That was my undoing. (*NU* 59)

Unable to act, unable to turn himself into a hero in the outside world, the underground man sinks "voluptuously into inertia" (*NU* 23), becoming "almost paralysed" (*NU* 61). In his essay 'The Great 'Ennui'', George Steiner identifies ennui as the concomitant opposition of nineteenth century positivistic optimism: "What I want to stress is the fact that a corrosive ennui is as much an element of nineteenth century culture as were the dynamic optimism of the positivist and the Whig [...] For every text of Benthamite confidence, of proud meliorism, we can find a counter statement of nervous fatigue"[15] Steiner proceeds via Baudelaire to source this fatigue in the alienation which inheres in city life. Boredom, ennui and melancholy will become for Sartre associated with man's contingency, whilst for Heidegger they represent the moods through which, and in which, one experiences 'the nothing'. Within Russian fiction, ennui functions as an indicator of the superfluous man, the displaced intellectual or the anonymous clerk. Rendered fictionally by Dostoevsky, the dangers of inertia, ennui and paralysis are theorised by Nietzsche:

> In the new generation, which has as it were inherited varying standards and values in its blood, all is unrest, disorder, doubt, experiment; the most vital forces have a retarding effect [...] centre of balance, upright certainty are lacking in body and soul. But that which becomes most profoundly sick and degenerates in such hybrids is the *will*: they no longer have any conception of independence of decision [...] Paralysis of will: where does one not find this cripple sitting today! [...] most of that which appears in the shop windows today as 'objectivity', 'scientificality', *l'art pour l'art*, 'pure will-less knowledge' is merely scepticism and will-paralysis dressed up.[16]

Nietzsche links will-paralysis to the uncertainty induced by the groundlessness and contingency of value, the lack of a stable and coherent centre. Science, objectivity and

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[15] George Steiner, 'The Great 'Ennui'' in *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 13-27, p.18.

[16] *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 208, p.137.

art attempt to provide a stability but the underground man would argue that they do so at the cost of individuality; at the cost of individual freedom. With a Germanic name, St. Petersburg was designed as Russia's window to the west, a kind of interzone, but as such it offers its inhabitants no unalloyed foundation. Near the end of the first part of the novel the narrator states: "Now, for example, I am particularly oppresed by one ancient memory [...] like a tiresome tune that keeps on nagging at one."(*NU* 46) In this passage, Dostoevsky is alluding to the opening of Heine's 'The Homecoming' ['*Die Heimkehr*'];

> I don't know what it should mean, that I am so sad,
> A fairy tale from old times will not leave my mind.[17]

The narrator of Heine's poem cannot return to the home of a lost love: the underground man simply has no home. For Heidegger this unhomeliness, the '*unheimlich*' is Dasein's condition, but it is double edged. Lack of foundation opens up the possibilities which reveal one's freedom, but also produces the anxiety in which this freedom feels threatened.

For Nietzsche, whilst scepticism and nihilism are necessary for the 'revaluation of all values', they are only preliminary stages; a kind of proto-Heideggerian 'clearing', prerequisite before new values can be created. Nihilism is then "only a *transitional stage*." Further, Nietzsche warns that "attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute."[18] The underground man simply stops with nihilism. *Notes from Underground* functions therefore like *A Hero of Our Time*, it is a diagnostic novel, it does not propose a cure. Dostoevsky's other works, in particular *Crime and Punishment*, suggest that nihilism be eclipsed by suffering and that man be redeemed by what Kierkegaard might term a leap to God.

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[17] Heinrich Heine, *Selected Verse*, ed. and trans. Peter Branscombe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p.40. Translation amended.
[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1901, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §7, p.11, §28, p19.

KAFKA

The Trial

Alienation, ambiguity and a persistent expression of homelessness dominate Kafka's writing. If language is the most prominent cultural marker, that which most readily furnishes us with a sense of identity, then self-insertion within another discursive system automatically renders the writer an 'outsider'. Kafka writes of course in German, the minority language of Prague and thus he writes neither in the Czech of his birthplace nor in the Hebrew of his ancestry. Whilst this effectuates a kind of cultural aporia, it simultaneously dislocates the writer from one linguistic or literary heritage and opens another, thereby enabling the construction of fresh fictional modes, or at least enabling the formation of an alternative discourse within a major language. This dual movement of emancipation and insertion is productive of what Deleuze and Guattari term a "minor literature".[19]

Language, particularly *choice* of language, assumes increasing importance in the development of the existentialist novel. Kierkegaard describes how for a writer, movement into an alien significatory system results in estrangement:

> Next after stripping myself naked, possessing nothing, not the smallest thing in the world, and then leaping into the water, I like most of all to speak a foreign language, preferably a living one, so as to become quite foreign to myself. (*J* §351, p.89) [20]

Entry into language then, particularly a foreign language, results in a fundamental alienation and can be read therefore as corresponding to one's entry into existence; what Heidegger characterises as man's thrownness [*geworfenheit*]. The opening sentences of both *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* depict this aspect of man's being. Kafka presents Gregor Samsa and Josef K. thrown into concrete situations:

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[19] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 'What is a Minor Literature' in (ed.) Ruth V. Gross, *Critical Essays on Franz Kafka* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990), pp.35-49. Deleuze and Guattari write that "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority construct within a major language." p.35.

[20] Alastair Hannay in his edition of Kierkegaard's journals retains the Danish "*entfremdet*" which he translates as "estranged". Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection,* ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p.138.

> As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.[21]
>
> Someone must have been spreading lies about Josef K. for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning.[22]

These passages also encapsulate the most immediately discernible differences between Kafka and Dostoevsky: narrative mode and narrative tone. In his study of Kafka, Martin Greenberg asserts that his fiction is related in a "dream narrative"[23]. Sartre, in a essay comparing Blanchot and Kafka, highlights the "minute and courtly style", the "nightmare politeness"[24], of the latter.

Where Dostoevsky's tone is philippic and sclerotic, Kafka's is matter-of-fact and calmly declarative; there is notable absence of exclamation, particularly in the first passage quoted. Kafka's heroes are never surprised by their fantastic situations. Heidegger's description of Dasein as thrown projection illuminates too Kafka's characterisation or more precisely Kafka's negative characterisation. K. is both presence and absence, both a being and a lack.

> What is it that defines K. as a unique being? Neither his physical appearance (we know nothing about that), nor his biography (we don't know it), nor his name (he has none), nor his memories, his predilections, his complexes. His behaviour? His field of action is lamentably limited. His thoughts? Yes, Kafka unceasingly traces K.'s reflections, but these are bent exclusively on the current situation [...] All of K.'s interior life is absorbed by the situation he finds himself trapped in, and nothing that might refer beyond that situation (K.'s memories, his metaphysical reflections, his notions about other people) is revealed to us.[25]

No family, no physical characteristics, no psychology: working through absence, Kafka's text presents us with an existential situation, moreover a situation in the

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[21] Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, 1916-1931, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p.9.
[22] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, 1925, trans. Douglas Scott and Chris Waller (London: Pan, 1977) p.17. Hereafter *T.*
[23] Martin Greenberg, *The Terror of Art: Kafka and Modern Literature* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968) p.10.
[24] Jean-Paul Sartre, '*Aminadab* or the Fantastic Considered as a Language' in *Literary Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p.57.
[25]Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, pp.25-6.

present, it is happening now, which has no discoverable causal antecedents. This causal lack spills into character, for as Kundera notes the space and detail which enable the attribution of behavioural patterns is absent. We enter a world in which any 'because' is either wholly lacking or so inaccessible that its existence makes little effective difference to the individual.

Whilst *Notes from Underground* utilises a first person narrator, Kafka elects for a third-person voice, only occasionally interrupted by moments of free indirect discourse. A predominantly third-person narrative mode may seem an unusual stylistic choice for an existentialist novelist but if, as some critics have suggested, Kafka's primary philosophical influences are Kierkegaard and Nietzsche[26], then the reason for the predominance of a third-person style may have been suggested to Kafka by the former. In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard writes that; "the majority of men are curtailed 'I's'; what was planned by nature as a possibility capable of being sharpened into an I is soon dulled into a third person." (*J* §1376, p.533) The use of a third person narratal mode helps therefore to underscore what Sartre identifies as the primary thematic of Kafka's text:

> That gloomy, evanescent atmosphere of *The Trial*, that ignorance which, however, is lived as ignorance, that total opacity which can only be felt as a presentiment across an entire translucency - this is nothing but the description of our *being-in-the-midst-of-the-world-for-others*.(*BN* 266)

The deployment of narrative strategies other than stream-of-consciousness, is suggestive then of K.'s being a "curtailed I", of his individual voice being absorbed by the third person and thus by the Other. The textual moments which employ free indirect discourse serve to assist rather than mitigate this move. Such a narrative mode although 'freer' than a third-person technique, still foregrounds the absence of

[26] Sartre, discussing Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* in a letter to Simone de Beauvoir states that Kafka "feathered his nest through that book." Ed. Simone de Beauvoir, *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir 1926-1939*, 1983, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman Macafee (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), p.416.
Malcolm Bradbury in his *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers* agrees with Sartre on the influence of Kierkegaard but also points out Kafka's fondness for Nietzsche. *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988).

the subjective 'I' which immediately transmits experience. K's language is always filtered, he never speaks as himself, he never appears to the reader in his own language. Free indirect speech occupies a lexical no-man's land midway between a pure subjectivity and the totalised objectivity of the third-person form. Kafka's application of narrative mechanisms reinforce then the condition of the textual subject: K. is not a Kierkegaardian 'existing individual', not a definite subjectivity; hence he is allowed no unmediated speech. However this may also be read as a Dostoevskian strategy. *Crime and Punishment* uses a third person narrative and here the impression is that there is always something beyond Raskolnikov, always something confining and controlling him.

Like the underground man, K. exemplifies moments of what Sartre terms 'bad faith'. Yet if the underground man's 'bad faith' arises from a surfeit of imagination, then Josef K.'s proceeds from a determined lack. In his essay 'K.'s Quest', Auden describes how

> the nature of Kafka's hero is radically different from all previous conceptions of the heroic. Previously the hero is the exceptional individual, exceptional either by his inborn gifts or his acquired virtues [...] K. on the other hand, suffers and fails to achieve his goal precisely because he *is* an individual [...] he cannot become what he wishes [...] because he cannot cease to be K.[27]

Auden identifies K.'s ordinariness as an entirely new conception of the heroic - a moot point - but it is his conclusion that is of significance for here Auden is in error. K.'s difficulties arise not because he *is* an individual but precisely because he is *not*. He cannot become so because he lives for, and allows himself to be, manipulated by others. Such an inauthentic mode of being is discussed by both Sartre and Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes Dasein's immersion in the world of "Others": "It itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. Dasein's everyday possibilities of Being are for others to dispose of as they please. These Others

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[27] W.H. Auden, 'K.'s Quest' in ed. Angel Flores, *The Kafka Problem* (New York: New Directions, 1946), pp.46-52, p.51-2.

moreover are not *definite* Others." (*BT* 164) In Heideggerian terms, K. becomes absorbed in the world of *das Man*, the 'They'[28]:

> The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*-that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [...] As they-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the "they", and must find itself [...] If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [...] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the 'world' and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (*BT* 167)

The Other, the they, is both within and without: the shadowy state is the 'indefinite' Other, but it is K. himself who effectively accedes to his dispersal. This is why ultimately K. is disposed of "like a dog" (*T* 254). K.'s executioners are representative of the "anonymous others" and his dying "like a dog" acutely depicts his non-achievment of authentic *human* being.

K.'s lack of definity is suggested further by the a-sequentiality of the text. *Prima facie*, the novel appears to follow the Aristotelian method rejected by Dostoevsky, but as Greenberg highlights *The Trial* is more an unfolding of an image than the presentation of an action; a deepening rather than a progression.[29] With the exception of the opening and concluding sections, the order in which the chapters are presented could be altered with little loss of sense. The text is paratactic, episodic, and one chapter (chapter eight) is incomplete. This is presumably not how Kafka would have wished the novel to be published, but as it stands this apparent randomness aids the reader in recognising K. as incomplete and inauthentic.

If the existentialist concerns of authenticity and alienation are constitutive of the text's primary thematic dynamic then perhaps the most salient moment of *The Trial* occurs in chapter nine. K.'s conversation with the priest together with the latter's rehearsal of the 'Before the Law' parable encapsulates the novel's theme of inauthenticity. When K. states that he is going to seek additional assistance in his case, the priest replies:

[28] The notion of the crowd as 'untruth' is found in most existentialist philosophies. Heidegger's attitude is present in both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.
[29] *The Terror of Art: Kafka and Modern Literature*, p.11.

"You ask too much help from other people [...] don't you see that this is not the kind of help you need [...] can't you see what is just in front of you nose!" (*T* 237) This passage restates the advice given to K. at the outset of the novel: first by the warders; "[do] not allow yourself to be distracted by useless ideas."(*T* 23) - a very Dostoevskian monition - and subsequently by The Inspector; "Think more about yourself"(*T* 28). The priest here represents what Sartre typifies as "The Other": "The other *looks* at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I *am*. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside of me, imprisoned in an absence." (*BN* 363) Expressing a general existentialist imprecation Sartre declares that "it is necessary that we *make ourselves* what we are." (*BN* 59) K. however is manufactured from without. At the beginning of the novel we are told that K. "still had his liberty." (*T* 21) but he does not use it.

K.'s quest is ultimately a quest for meaning: K. identifies two crucial questions at the outset of the novel: "who is making the accusation? What authority is conducting the proceedings?" (*T* 27) but seeks answers in the external, in the court and its employees. When K. is taken a tour of the court offices by the usher, K. asks for help in finding the exit, fearing he will become lost if unaided. The usher replies that there is only one way K. can go. (*T* 84) K. however fails to take this Nietzschean[30] advice. K. perceives that meaning and truth lie outwith the self, he fails to recognise that they are constructs of the subject. Thus when he becomes ill during his tour of the court, the girl who assists him states that "our judicial system is not very well known to the public". (*T* 88) Implicit in this is that the answers K. seeks are to be found in the *private* world, in subjectivity.

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[30] In 'Schopenhauer as Educator' Nietzsche writes;

> No one can construct for you the bridge upon which precisely you must cross the stream of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are to be sure countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through this stream; but only at the cost of yourself: you would put yourself in pawn and lose yourself. There exists in the world a single path along which no one can go except you: whither does it lead? Do not ask, go along it.

Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator' in *Untimely Meditations*, 1873-1876, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.127-194, p.129.

Das Gesetz, the German for 'law', is neuter. The normal capitalisation of the noun in German, suggests a proper name and thus a universal, an abstraction, but also perhaps a Platonic form. As a Platonic ideal, the Law lies outwith the reach of the phenomenal in the realm of unknowable *noumena*:

> Watchful, fearful, hopeful, the answer prowls around the question, searches desperately in its impenetrable face, follows it along the most senseless paths, that is along the paths leading as far as possible away from the answer[31]

Meaning is never found because one seeks it in an inaccessible metaphysical realm - "the very highest Court, which is absolutely inaccessible to you, to me and to all of us." (*T* 181) - whereas one should search the phenomenal, one should search oneself. Man, as the existentialists see him, is no longer anchored in the transcendent. Meaning is made, not discovered; it is brought about through the exercise of individual freedom.[32]

The Trial opens and closes with unanswered questions. K. and the reader share the same hermeneutical problem: what is the text about? The reader, however, like K., never has a completely unsullied view of the textual world. The crepuscular quality of the narrative renders the text ambiguous. The innominate officials (a technique utilised similarly in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), the unspecified charge, the unnamed city with its anonymous streets and anonymous rooms combine to produce an inexorable opacity which the reader in common with K. cannot quite penetrate. As is suggested

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[31] Franz Kafka, *The Collected Aphorisms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), no. 76, p.18.

[32] In this compare Nietzsche: "The "true world" and the "apparent world" - that means: the mendaciously invented world and reality." *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo,* 1887 and 1908, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p.218.
Nietzsche's resistance to Platonic ideals also surfaces in *Twilight of the Idols*: "The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'real' world has only been *lyingly added* ..."; The real world - an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer - an idea grown useless, superfluous, *consequently* a refuted idea: let us abolish it!" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, 1889 and 1895, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.36, p.38.
Sartre and Heidegger also reject the phenomena/noumena dualism.

by *Notes from Underground*, whilst life is being lived, the individual cannot access some objective viewpoint from which order and purpose will become apparent. Lack of perspicuity therefore is Kafka's move against the possibility of absolute knowledge. Ambiguity of setting forces the reader to maintain focus upon K. whilst it also declines attention from the external objective world; the two must be grasped together. Kafka's elision of the systematic is in one sense more implicit than Dostoevsky's but in another just as explicit. In *The Trial*, The Court fulfils a role similar to that assigned The Crystal Palace in *Notes from Underground* in that it encompasses the objective systematicity of the determined world, where every component (every individual) has its allotted function: the court is literally everywhere. Sartre sees it as a metaphor for one's existence; "the characteristic in human reality of being perpetually in court. To be free is to *have one's freedom perpetually on trial*." (*BN* 502) One has to struggle, choose and act, continuously.

If as Sartre claims, K. is not absurd in the Camusian sense[33], then he certainly seems to be in the manner described by Kierkegaard:

> The *absurd*. And what is the *absurd*? It is ... that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act and yet here is where I have to act. (*J* §871, p.291)

This passage explains the following segment of *The Trial*: "there was a mutual attraction between the court and guilt from which it followed that the room where the hearing would take place was bound to be up whichever stairs K. happened to choose." (*T* 52) The guilt to which Kafka alludes emerges like Sartrean 'nausea' from K.'s consciousness of a need to choose and thus a need to act. The need to act is suggested further by the explicit theatricality of the text. When the two executioners arrive in the last chapter, K. describes them as "old ham actors" and asks "What theatre are you playing at?" (*T* 249) For Sartre, drama or theatre is inherently philosophical because it reveals man in action[34], however, this can be expanded to

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[33] '*Aminadab* or the Fantastic Considered as a Language', *Literary Essays*, p.62.

[34] In 'The Purposes of Writing':

> philosophy is dramatic in nature. The time for contemplating the

include the novel. Fiction of whatever form is employed by existentialist novelists to depict the 'being-there' of man. A particular subjectivity exists in a particular world within which he or she has to act. Setting is therefore of import and this would seem to defeat any interpretation which assess the text using psychiatric tropes of the Freudian or Jungian type.[35] Lionel Trilling in his piece 'Freud and Literature' instances a psychological interpretation: "Kafka, with an apparent awareness of what he was doing, has explored the Freudian conceptions of guilt and punishment, of the dream and of the fear of the father."[36] Psychological or psychoanalytic readings seem to ignore one of Kafka's aphorisms - "Never again psychology!"[37] - but further they relegate the world K. inhabits to a form of inconsequential narrative packing. Moreover a psychological reading needs some evidence of a psyche with which to get going. As Kundera points out, if psychological realism depends upon character information, whether ways of speaking, ways of behaving, or a past which motivates the present, then K. possess none of these, he has no properties other than his being-in-a-situation.

In *What is Literature*? Sartre writes "the degree of realism and truth of Kafka's mythology, these are never given. The reader must invent them all in a continual

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> immobility of substances which are what they are, or for laying bare the laws underlying a succession of phenomena is past. Philosophy is concerned with *man* - who is at once agent and actor, who produces and plays his drama while he lives the contradictions of his situation, until either his individuality is shattered or his conflicts are resolved. A play ... is the most appropriate vehicle today for showing *man* in action, - i.e. *man full stop*. It is with this man that philosophy, from its own point of view, should be concerned. That is why the theatre is philosophical and philosophy dramatic.

Jean-Paul Sartre, 'The Purposes of Writing' in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, 1972, trans. John Matthews (London: NLB, 1974), pp.8-32, pp.11-12.

[35] The existentialist analysis favoured by the 'anti-psychiatrists' R.D. Laing and Ludwig Binswanger rejects the use of such abstractions as 'The Oedipal Complex' or 'The Collective Unconsciousness' because they rely upon universalistic notions of human nature. Sartre's concept of 'bad faith' is an attempt to explain consciousness existentially and thus without psychological/psychiatric universals. Heidegger too eschews all traditional psychological terminology in his *Being and Time*.

[36] Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature' in ed. David Lodge, *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp.276-90, p.279.

[37] Franz Kafka, *The Collected Aphorisms*, No. 93, p.22.

exceeding of the written thing. To be sure, the author guides him, but all he does is guide him. The landmarks he sets up are separated by the void. The reader must unite them." (*WIL* 31) Absence of realistic plotting necessitates that the reader focus upon K. and K.'s situation. To achieve this consistency of focus, Kafka purges both simile and metaphor from the narrative for both propose a 'like a', their employment would lift the narrated events from the concrete. *The Trial* maintains a constant haecceity, a precision. All that matters in the novel is here and now. Kafka's text does not utilise the first-person strategy that we find in *Notes from Underground* but it is nevertheless a centred text in that it concentrates entirely upon Josef K. We experience the text from K.'s viewpoint alone. The use of an initial makes K. into a symbol, a paradigm but also suggests a percolated subjectivity or an individual reduced to a 'case'. In his symbolic last name is encompassed one of the paradoxes of existentialism: K. is both a particular and a universal; both paradigm and individual.

SARTRE AND CAMUS

The Outsider and *Nausea*

In a review essay devoted to *The Outsider*, Sartre quotes the Gallimard editor Jean Paulhan who describes Camus' novel as "like Kafka written by Hemingway".[38] Sartre disagrees:

> M. Camus' views are entirely of this earth, and Kafka is the novelist of impossible transcendence; for him, the universe is full of signs that we cannot understand; there is a reverse side to the décor. For M. Camus, on the contrary, the tragedy of human existence lies in the absence of any meaning. (ibid.)

For Kafka, meaning does exist but it is inaccessible. Camus' cycle of the Absurd, of which *The Outsider* forms one third, is a means of presenting an individual in a universe where meaning is absent, for absurdity, in the Camusian sense, arises from a fundamental collision between an individual's desire for clarity and an implacable universe; it is both a depiction and a realisation of a basic and ineluctable incoherence. As Sartre notes, absurdity and the absurd novel constitute both a statement of a fact and the transcription of the lucid awareness which certain people acquire of this fact.

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[38]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Camus' The Outsider', *Literary Essays*, pp.24-41, p.34.

(ibid.) Within Camus' novel, awareness and presentation of absurdity is registered on the twin levels of form and content.

Like Sartre, Camus looks to American fiction[39] to provide literary models. In *The Outsider* these influences are registered in and through the narrative form, but, and again like Sartre, borrowed form is used to better advance existential themes. Camus writes deliberately against the tradition of the realistic novel of Balzac. The most immediately apparent signifier of Camus' departure from French literary tradition is also one which is unfortunately lost when the novel is translated into English. As many critics have pointed out, Camus for the most part utilises the *perfect* rather than the *past* historic, the preterite.[40] This is of course crucial at a thematic level given that the past historic designates narrative order, chronological sequentiality and conveys a historical teleology. It also maintains an accent of immutable determinability, and determinsm, other than by self and of self, is, as we have discussed above, rejected both by existentialist philosophers and existentialist novelists. This is given a theoretical treatment by Roland Barthes, but I want to postpone discussion of Barthes until the next chapter, for what he terms 'zero degree' writing is of considerable importance to an understanding of *A Chancer*.

The Outsider uses a first person narrator, but not however in a traditional manner. Consider the opening segment of the novel.

> Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I had a telegram from the home: 'Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely.' That doesn't mean anything. It may have been yesterday. The old people's home is at Marengo, forty miles from Algiers. I'll catch the two o'clock bus and get there in the afternoon.

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[39]Camus describes his not unproblematic relationship with American fiction in an interview with Jeanine Delpech. Whilst emphasising that *The Outsider* uses the technique of the American novel, Camus feels that this method leads to a "dead end": "I would give a hundred Hemingways for one Stendhal or one Benjamin Constant." See 'Three Interviews', *Lyrical and Critical*, 1950, trans. Philip Thody (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), pp.259-274, p.261.

[40]See for instance Patrick McCarthy, *Albert Camus: The Stranger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.22. An earlier but still valuable discussion of Camus' writing can be found in John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

> Then I can keep the vigil and I'll come back tomorrow night. I asked my boss for two days off and he couldn't refuse under the circumstances. But he didn't seem pleased. I even said, 'It's not my fault.' He didn't answer.[41]

In French, the demotic 'maman' imbues the narrative with a colloquiality which is dimisished by the use of 'mother' in the translation.[42] However, we can see that the Hemingway comparison holds valid for the opening is composed of concise colourless sentences. This is a purged narrative, there is one solitary adjective, "old", and Camus uses a noticeably reduced vocabulary. Sentences are short, clipped, but crucially what is absent is any sense of omniscience. Traditional first-person speakers convey a quality of priviliged understanding which is wholly absent here. "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know." The epistemological doubt is registered in the second sentence and this opens up the novel's theme of incoherence and so absurdity. We receive experiences as Meursault lives through them, the first-person ensures a directness and the form itself is pivotal in the production of sense, for here as throughout, the sentences are rarely relational. Meursault is not then an understanding narrator for understanding is a retrospective activity. Meursault describes rather than comprehends. As Sartre points out, within *The Outsider*:

> Each sentence is a present instant, but not an indecisive one that spreads like a stain to the following one. The sentence is sharp, distinct and self-contained. It is seperated by a void from the following one [...] The world is destroyed and reborn from sentence to sentence. When the word makes an appearance it is creation *ex nihilo*. The sentences in *The Outsider* are islands.(ibid. 38)

Islands in the stream perhaps, but it is the absence of relation which is key. The sentences are isolates, they lack conjuction, explanation or clarification. They highlight only tense and verb, providing an existential immediacy and move through juxtaposition rather than progression. Temporality is skewed for Meursault is uncertain when his mother died, today or yesterday. This is Camus' way of registering the lack of connection in the Absurdist universe: meaningful frames, whether

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[41] Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, 1942, trans. Joseph Laredo (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983). Hereafter *O.*

[42] "*Aujourd'hui, maman est morte*". Albert Camus, *L'Etranger*, 1942 (London: Methuen, 1958), p.21.

narrational, epistemic or temporal, are withdrawn. This is vividly rendered at the close of the first section of the novel. When Meursault is interviewed by the examining magistrate, he is asked to recount the day during which the Arab has been shot. He describes it thus: "Raymond, the beach, the swim, the fight, the beach again, the little spring, the sun and the five shots." (*O* 66) Here we are presented with stills rather than a moving picture. Meursault can only provide the factual instants, he cannot provide an explanation or a connection. He relates conjoined, in Hume's sense, events rather than moments in a causal sequence. Noticeably however the only conjunction which intrudes, "and" links the sun to the five shots. Throughout Camus' text the sun symbolises the otherness and unintelligibility of the universe. It beats down steadily and unremittingly; it is simply there, impassive and it underscores the contingency of the human world.

> We just stared fixedly at one another and here amid the sand, the sun and the sea, in the dual silence of the flute and the water, everything was at a standstill. I realized at that point that you could either shoot or not shoot. (*O* 57)

The sun represents the absence of meaning and this absence ensures that Meursault is left to form his judgement alone. Nothing is present which can assist, for everything else is "still"; nothing points to a solution or a way to go. Decision is entirely up to Meursault. Thus the sun is often felt as an oppressive presence. Meursault wants to "escape from the sun", to rid himself and the world of incoherence and to do so, in the first section of the novel, he indulges in a sensual life, but the novel ends with Meursault establishing what he terms a "melancholy truce": I looked up at the mass of signs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world." (*O* 117) This is the lucidity of awareness, the realisation to which Sartre refers. Absurdity is not therefore something which can be negated, instead it is accepted and one lives with the consequences.

Whilst Camus uses form to render content, within the novel there is a more general problematisation of language. A contrast between two languages is activated in the first paragraph of the novel. The language of the state "Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely" attempts to transcribe and enclose a state of affairs, but

for Meursault it "doesn't mean anything". In a reversal, the language of the court, of the prosecution, attempts to comprehend Meursault but it fails, there is a communicative incapacity: they cannot understand Meursault and Meursault cannot understand them. He records that the judge "hadn't quite grasped my system of defence". (*O* 99) Asked why he killed the Arab: "Mixing up my words a bit and realizing that I sounded ridiculous, I said quickly that it was because of the sun. Some people laughed." (*O* 99) Language it seems cannot replicate or accurately depict without distortion and so the alternative is silence. Here the novel suggests that only in silence can the obfuscatory tendency of language be diminished. Remaining silent precludes the falsification which inheres in language.

The novel charts then the collision between the individual, Meursault, and what he terms the "mechanism". This term has several referents. One is the guillotine, Meursault's method of execution, but it refers further to the language, the structures, and the society, within which Meursault finds himself. The mechanism renders Meursault an outsider because he cannot be accommodated within its fixed parameters. It is the mechanism that judges, the mechanism that condemns and the mechanism that will end his life. It is a regulated and ordered system, it is the progeny of the Crystal Palace and The Court. "What interests me at the moment is trying to escape from the mechanism, trying to find if there's any way out of the inevitable" (*O* 104) but the text reveals that "everything was set against it, and I was caught in the mechanism again." (*O* 105)

Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea* recalls both *Notes from Underground*, and *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*. As with the former, the novel is presented to us as an edited text; like the latter, it assumes the form of a diary. The diary form is Sartre's method of rendering the discontinuity of experience that we discussed above - the first page of Roquentin's diary is an undated sheet, placed at random by the editors - but *Nausea* is a more explicitly philosophical text than *The Outsider*. In her study of the novel, Rhiannon Goldthorpe quotes Sartre's description of *Nausea*; as being a "*factum sur la contingence*"[43]. As Goldthorpe states, factum has two senses: the setting out of a

[43]Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *La Nauseé* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), p.2.

case, a presentation, and also a polemic. *Nausea* is Sartre's polemic upon contingency. As a novel it presents in fictional form the majority of the themes later formalised in *Being and Nothingness*.

Like the underground man, Roquentin lives a life of bad faith, a vicarious life: "everything I know about life I have learnt from books." (*N* 95) Sartre's narrator describes of a fictional character "I was lending him my life", but unlike Dostoevsky's anti-hero, Roquentin realises his error: "I've stopped writing my book about Robellon; it is finished, I can't go on writing it. What am I going to do with my life?" (*N* 138); "I have just learnt, all of a sudden, for no apparent reason, that I have been lying to myself for ten years. Adventures are in books." (*N* 58) The something which has happened is of course the 'nausea' to which the title of the text refers. Nausea, what Mathieu in *The Age of Reason* describes as 'the taste of oneself'[44] occurs through the realisation of both the factical and the contingent aspects of human existence. Contingency reveals the gap between the subjective choosing self and the objective, determined world.

> The essential thing is contingency. I mean that, by definition, existence is not necessity. To exist is simply to *be there*; what exists appears, lets itself be *encountered*, but you can never *deduce* it. There are people, I believe, who have understood that. Only they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not an illusion, an appearance which can be dissipated; it is absolute, and consequently perfect gratuitousness. Everything is gratuitous, that park, this town, and myself. When you realise that, it turns your stomach over and everything starts floating about [...] that is the Nausea; that is what the Bastards [...] try to hide from themselves with their idea of rights. But what a poor lie [...]. (*N* 188)

Contingency is pervasive for it encompasses both existence and essence - what is might not have been and what is might not have been what it is - both Roquentin and the park in which he sits. For Roquentin, contingency is equivalent to absurdity and

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[44]"I *am* my own taste, I exist. That's what existence means: draining one's own self dry without the sense of thirst." Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason*, 1945, trans. Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.48.

his realisation of man's meaninglessness *sub specie aeternitatis* is fully revealed when he perceives a chestnut tree:

> The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remembered that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that black knotty mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. (*N* 182)

This passage depicts the crude remoteness of nature: the individual is left "alone" in front of its "black knotty mass". Anti-Romantic in the extreme, there is here no suggestion of communion with some transcendent *Geist*; instead there is a decided lack of connection and relation - everything is *de trop*. The tree does not mean anything, does not represent anything: it just exists. But Roquentin differs form Meursault here in that whilst the end of *The Outsider* finds the latter regarding nature with indifference and thereby achieving a kind of comfort, a consolation, for Roquentin nature induces fear. Notice too that language has become ineffectual, at least as a means of transmitting and holding on to experience: "Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things". Words and things effectively come apart, revealing an absence of necessity, of permanent conjunction. This permanence has been usurped, replaced by the contingent.

> I am beginning to believe that nothing can ever be proved. These are reasonable hypotheses which take the facts into account: but I am only too well aware that they come from me, that they are simply a way of unifying my own knowledge. (*N* 26)

Meaning, relation and form are products of human artifice, thus when they are stripped away all that remains is the brute thisness of things, naked existence. Roquentin therefore becomes aware, *avant la lettre*, of the distance between what *Being and Nothingness* terms *être-pour-soi* and *être-en-soi*, being-for-itself, and being-in-itself. All that is not man is *être-en-soi*. Man, because of his unique consciousness is burdened with responsibility, 'condemned' to be free:

> Never have I felt as strongly as today that I was devoid of secret dimensions, limited to my body, to the airy thoughts that float up from it like bubbles. I build my memories with my present. I am rejected, abandoned in the present. I try in vain to rejoin the past: I cannot escape from myself. (*N* 53)

The attempt to escape what one is (a free choosing self) results, as in Kafka, with subsumption in 'the they' or as Sartre has it 'bad faith': "People who live in society have learnt how to see themselves, in mirrors, as they appear to their friends." (*N* 32) What is described as "the mirror trap" (*N* 49) represents Being-for-others. For Roquentin, the portraits of the bourgeoisie are symbolic of bad faith at both an individual and societal level. In Bouville society men such as Olivier Blévigne construct and inhabit a world ordered upon inveterate notions of 'rights' and 'duty'. The Bouville elite "were entitled to everything: to life, to work, to wealth, to authority, to respect, and finally to immortality." Such a society determines the roles of its people; women are above all "wives and mothers"[45], who "raise fine children" and teach them "their rights and duties, religion, and respect for the traditions which have gone into the making of France." (*N* 122-123) We are told how Blévigne's son swore at an early age to "devote his life to the re-establishment of order." (*N* 134) But Roquentin warns that "the world of explanations and reasons is not that of existence." (*N* 185) Like Meursault, Roquentin has seen under and through these everyday purposive structures. Significantly then, the portraits of the town dignitaries are dark brown[46]; the narrative thus establishes a connection between the Bouville notaries and the brute existence of the chestnut tree. The tree just exists, the bourgeoisie surrender their freedom to a culturally transmitted determinism and therefore become as artificial as their portraits.

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[45] This passage, which designates women as the "help-mates" of the (male) town notaries, hints at the feminist existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and the self/other dualism discussed in her *The Second Sex*. The allocation of roles predicts de Beauvoir's pronouncement that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature". *The Second Sex*, 1949, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Pan, 1988), p.295.

[46] "The general hue of the portraits bordered on dark brown. Bright colours had been banished, out of a sense of decency." p.123.

The "mirror trap" is however also a method of narration. Sartre begins his essay on Dos Passos by stating that "A novel is a mirror"[47], a relatively traditional assertion, but Sartre intends a specific kind of mirroring. Here Sartre effects an overlap between phenomenology and fictional technique and the resulting synthesis is Sartre's challenge to both French literature and French philosophy. As R D Cumming points out, Sartre sees in Dos Passos a particular kind of mirroring, a particular kind of reflecting.

> Dos Passos art of storytelling is superficial in the sense that a looking glass is merely "reflective"; all that is disclosed by his descriptions is a succession of appearances [...] But reflection in the traditional French novel was a different and more profound undertaking, which Sartre is employing the mirror analogy to discredit. [...] In this tradition reflection is explanatory: individuals in the novel pause to reflect and explain what they are doing, by reference to their characters. And insofar as their explanations are incomplete, they allow themselves to be further explained by the reflections of the novelist. They, or the novelist, intervene in the succession of appearances, go behind what they appear to be doing, and discover what they are really doing [...] The succession of appearances is no longer inexplicable but predetermined.[48]

Like Camus, Sartre seeks to eject determinism, the predetermined, from the narrative but for Sartre, this is to retain the phenomenological *Abschattungen*, the succession of appearances by which consciousness is constituted. "I *was* the root of the chestnut tree. Or rather I was all consciousness of its existence. Still detached from it - since I was conscious of it - and yet lost in it, nothing but it." (*N* 188) This passage from *Nausea* is clearly phenomenological: consciousness is nothing other than the object(s) it intends; consciousness is consciousness *of* and consciousness *is* by virtue of its not being what it is conscious of. Through praising the technical devices of Dos Passos, Sartre is simultaneously rejecting the Proustian novel. Sartre wants to replace it with a narrative concerned with the detailing of *Abschattungen*, "inexplicable tumults of colour, sound and passion" (90) and this means description without explanation. "Proust analysed them, related them to former states and thereby made them

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[47]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'John Dos Passos and *1919*', *Literary Essays*, pp.88-96, p.88.
[48]Robert Denoon Cumming 'Introduction', *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp.3-47, p7.

inevitable. Dos Passos wants to retain only their factual nature." (91) As does Sartre for whom writing should be phenomenological in that it should detail without explaining. So if Sartre rejects the Husserlian *epoche* because it brackets the world - it leaves consciousness *un*situated - he does however practice a kind of novelistic *epoche* in that he brackets out either an explaining, reflective character or an explaining, reflective author.

This sketch has brought out a cluster of themes and techniques. Dostoevsky discloses existential themes through a narrative written in a language only recently utilised for literary purposes. *Notes from Underground* is centred on a disaffected individual attempting to achieve and exhibit freedom against prevailing social and philosophical schemes. As we have seen this narrative is unsystematic, with both form and narrator attempting to resist the determined and the determining. The underground man lapses into bad faith, something he shares with Kafka's Joseph K.. Kafka provides us with the motif of inaccessible meaning and the narrative technique of negative characterisation. Kafka's individual, like Dostoevsky's, is positioned against a system, but here this system is expanded and intensified until becoming omnipresent. *The Trial* exemplifies fantastic realism; K's. trial, his situation, has the logic and consistency of a dream. Camus too illustrates an individual conflict, here against 'the mechanism' and this conflict is delivered through a purged narrative which attempts to register the incomprehensibility of the world. For Sartre, the task of the writer is to reveal the contingent and thereby the freedom of which the self is made. Roquentin, the most intellectual of these existential protagonists, has an internal conflict between acceptance of his freedom and the need for permanence. Contingency and freedom necessitate a counterbalancing fictional technique which Sartre, like Camus, gleans from American novelists. This then in brief is the existential tradition. This is the background against which Kelman's novels are to be read. I shall from time to time assess other texts, but these it seems to me are the crucial narratives in any consideration of existential literature. It is time to examine Kelman's novels.

A Chancer:
Ambiguity, Contingency and Possibility.

Men of chance.- The essential part of every invention is the work of chance, but most men never encounter this chance. **Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*.**[1]

[T]he philosophy of existence decisively breaks the frame of necessity within which every type of dogmatic philosophy moves. The perspective that it recognises, and within which it moves, is that of *possibilities*. **Nicholas Abbagnano, 'Existentialism is a Positive Philosophy'.**[2]

What is action? - the eternal question of the novel, its constitutive question so to speak. How is a decision born? How is it transformed into an act, and how do acts connect to make an adventure? **Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*** [3]

Loose ends, things unrelated, shifts, nightmare journeys, cities arrived at and left, meetings, desertions, betrayals, all manner of unions, adulteries, triumphs, defeats ... these are the facts. **Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*.**[4]

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[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, 1881, trans. R J Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.364.
[2]Nicholas Abbagnano, 'Existentialism is a Positive Philosophy', trans. Nino Langiulli, in ed. Nino Langiulli, *European Existentialism* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1997), p.285.
[3]Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p.48.
[4]Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 1963 (London: John Calder, 1992), pp.12-13.

Published one year after *The Busconductor Hines*, *A Chancer* appears technically regressive. Whilst retaining the characteristic absences - speech markers, conventions of punctuation - which pervade both *Hines* and Kelman's subsequent novels, read beside those texts which follow, *A Chancer* is anomalous in that it is a uniquely extrinsic novel. Gone is the exigent, personal tone and the internal dialogical quality which the reader encounters in the other works. Instead, these Kelman tropes are replaced by an indifferent third-person voice which only occasionally suggests or relates internal processes. What appears a stylistic *volte face* is however clarified by Kelman himself. Although published after *Hines*, *A Chancer* is actually a much earlier novel, one which Kelman began when he was aged 28[5]. When he came to revise and complete it for publication, Kelman declined to impose his more familiar technical devices since these had evolved since the novel was begun (this itself is an interesting existential point: the novel belongs to Kelman's past, the realm of being-in-itself, and therefore it cannot be altered). So, *A Chancer* needs to be seen and read as a stage in Kelman's work (indeed as his first full length fiction it reworks material from previous short stories)[6]. This does not mean that we need either relegate or disregard the text, since if *Hines* constitutes an 'intellectual' novel, what Kelman terms a novel of "intellectual exploration"[7] then *A Chancer*, despite being technically atypical, may be read as a physical counterpoint. Where Hines ruminates, Tammas acts; Hines attempts continually to suspend the world, Tammas continually engages with it. Like some Beckettian synthesis of Cartesian categories the two narrative strategies can be seen as complementary facets of the same aesthetic. However, although the novel does not take place *within* Tammas, it does gives us a vision of his internal life through the relation of external events. In this way, Kelman offers his own version of what Gertrude Stein terms "the inside as seen from the outside"[8], which is itself a

[5]Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed' in ed. Murdo Macdonald, *Nothing is Altogether Trivial: An Anthology of Writing from Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p.114 .

[6]At least two episodes within the novel are rewrites of stories previously published in *Not Not While the Giro*. The opening segment of *A Chancer*, the card game in the factory, is a revision of the story 'Double or clear plus a tenner'; whilst the episode dealing with Tammas' brief employment in the copper factory (*C* 244*ff*) is a reworking of 'The Chief Thing About This Game'.

[7]Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed', p. 116.

[8]Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, 1933 (Harmondsworth:

restatement of a fictional principle found in Gogol and Lermontov, the idea of inferential characterisation.[9]

The adoption of this prose method is significant for through this almost exclusive meditation upon action, *A Chancer* contends with the problematic of existential identity, which in its Sartrean formulation consists solely in projected activity. This brings forth an adjoining problem, for as Heidegger and Abbagnano[10] point out, the formation of identity through projection depends upon *possibility* and it is thus this notion which Abbagnano promotes as the defining feature of the philosophy of existence, and which Heidegger sees as constitutive of Dasein. *A Chancer* discloses these existential issues through both its style and subject matter. The fragmented and seemingly contingent structure of the novel replicates the ontological status of the central character Tammas, whilst gambling, Tammas' principle activity, embraces a cluster of existential motifs of which the most noticeable is the relation and interplay of chance and fate, free will and determinism. Gambling acts then as a route of access between technique and content since it is through contingency and related issues that the existential theme and its method of articulation are conjoined. However, given that the novel features little in the way of plot and little in the way of dialogue, in this chapter I concentrate primarily on narrative method, and how this method substantiates and articulates an existential viewpoint. The last sections of this chapter deal with gambling.

For Kelman, "the problems [in] writing the *Chancer* [sic] were how to be absolutely concrete, [...] to do nothing that was abstract, nothing that was internal, there are some internal sections in *Chancer* but they are technically irrelevant, or redundant:

Penguin, 1966), p. 170. Kelman indicates the influence of Stein in 'K is for Culture', p.26.

[9]Robert Reid identifies what he terms "inferential characterisation" as central to nineteenth century Russian realism. "The assumption was that from external indicators, facial expressions, complexion changes [...] it was possible to infer both transitory inner states and more permanent mental and psychic personality." Robert Reid, *Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1997), p.38. Kelman substitutes acts for physical description.

[10]Nicholas Abbagnano, 'Existentialism is a Positive Philosophy', *European Existentialism*, pp. 276-301.

they don't have to be there."[11] Concretion and eschewal of abstraction are crucial moves in Kelman's writing and it is something to which I shall attend throughout, but this concern with immediacy and concretion, particularly when taken at a narrative level, together with the lack of an internal viewpoint, point immediately toward an engagement with a set of aesthetic problems posed firstly by Camus and Sartre and then developed and re-theorised by Robbe-Grillet and Barthes. As various critics - Roderick Watson, Cairns Craig and Drew Milne[12] - have noticed, *A Chancer* exemplifies what Barthes terms 'Zero Degree' writing. I want to agree with this claim but also to modify and develop its exegetical possibilities. This development is necessary because Craig and Watson, since they pursue other critical agendas, mention Barthes only in passing, whilst Milne's piece is more concerned to disclose convergences between Kelman, Adorno and Marcuse. However, in order to expose the significance of the novel's narrative style it is imperative that the poetics of the *nouveau roman*, of zero degree writing, are placed within, and assessed through, a broadly existentialist discourse. This is for two reasons. Firstly this is Kelman's procedural basis, the writers and thinkers with whom he engages are read in terms of a primary constitutive existentiality, and secondly, the new novel is itself greatly influenced by existentialism and by Sartre in particular.[13] So, although it may seem initially puzzling that an existential writer such as Kelman aligns himself with the programme of the new novel, this puzzlement dissolves when we grasp that Kelman adopts those components of the *nouveau roman* which correspond to, or spring from, this prior existential discourse.

Barthes has Camus in mind when he describes the contest between what he terms 'Classical' writing and 'zero degree' writing. Famously for Barthes, Camus indicates his movement to the latter by jettisoning the preterite, the past historic, a form

[11]ibid, p.115.

[12]Roderick Watson, 'The Rage of Caliban: The "Unacceptable" Face and the "Unspeakable" Voice in Contemporary Scottish Writing', p.56. Cairns Craig, 'James Kelman', *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, p. 170. Drew Milne, 'James Kelman: Dialectics of Urbanity', p.394.

[13]See for instance Anna Boschetti, 'Sartre and the Age of the American Novel', trans. Maria-Teresa Vanderboegh and David Vanderboegh, in eds. Jean-François Fournay and Charles D Minahen, *Situating Sartre in Twentieth-Century Thought and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1997), pp. 71-92, p. 84-5.

obsolete in spoken French. To Barthes this is also an indicator that Camus is rejecting a narrative which inserts itself into or identifies itself as belonging to "Art":

> the preterite, which is the cornerstone of Narration, always signifies the presence of Art; it is part of a ritual of Letters. Its function is no longer that of a tense. The part it plays is to reduce reality to a point of time, and to abstract, from the depth of a multiplicity of experiences, a pure verbal act, freed from the existential roots of knowledge, and directed towards a logical link with other acts, other processes, a general movement of the world: it aims at maintaining a hierarchy in the realm of facts. Through the preterite, the verb implicitly belongs with a causal chain.[14]

Disrupting the "ritual of Letters" is a Kelman given, but the key terms here for an existential reading are "multiplicity of events", "logical link" and "causal chain". As Barthes explains it, the preterite conceals a "demiurge a God or a reciter" (27) through which there is a unification of cause and end and thus a narrative *telos*. All of which has an anti-existential thrust: "the teleology common to the Novel [Barthes means the 'Classical', bourgeois novel] and to narrated history is the alienation of the facts" (29). In alienating facts, in both unfolding and upholding a causal teleology, the preterite and the novels with which it is associated banish ambiguity and mystery - two characteristics of the existential *Lebenswelt* - but also perforce contingency. Here a Sartrean allusion emerges, for Sartre had earlier charged the bourgeois novel with neglecting "the strangeness and opacity of the world". (*WIL* 87) The preterite, the key tense of the bourgeois or classical text, imputes then an inevitability to related events and in so doing generates a determinism, a linkage and ordering, whereby the narrative is made inexorably sequential: it is remember a *past* tense, the events it records are over. An existential narrative however seeks to depict the world as lacking precisely these logical links, these relations and forms, which the preterite imposes. In order to recover and display these lost existentials, the preterite needs to be supplanted:

> [when] the preterite is replaced by less ornamental forms, fresher, more full-blooded and nearer to speech (the present tense or the present perfect), Literature becomes the receptacle of existence in all

[14]Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero & Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith 1953, 1964 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. 26-7. References hereafter in the text.

> its density [...] the acts it recounts are still separated from History, but no longer from people. (28).

The "colourless" or "neutral" writing of Camus and Kelman is therefore a writing which seeks to maintain concretion - events are reunited with people, language moves nearer to speech - but importantly writing which maintains the ambiguity and contingency which conjure the "density" of existence.

> Aside from the low droning noise it was quiet in this section of the factory. In the smoke-area around a dozen men were sitting at a big wooden table, involved in a game of solo. (*C* 1)

The opening sentence of *A Chancer* has little literary ornament, but it is through the almost inconspicuous use of "this" that both haecceity and a sense of presentness are brought forth: "this" supplies the necessary concretion. However, *A Chancer* also divulges the inconclusive and the ambiguous, for numerous epistemological gaps 'fill' the novel. In the passage above, the preposition "around" indicates an uncertainty in the narrative; there is no claim to know. When Margaret and Robert, Tammas' sister and brother-in-law, first appear in the novel, (*C* 31), their relationship to Tammas is not stated, instead it is gradually revealed. When Tammas goes to play football, the narrative records that the men are "laughing at something" (*C* 86) but the narrator does not intercede to reveal at what. Consider too the following passage.

> Aye. Fuck sake. McCann was frowning at him.
> Naw I mean if it was just cause of the dough and that ...
> Naw.
> Tammas continued on by himself.
>
> • • •
>
> I bumped into that girl earlier on.
> What was that?
> Margaret shook her head. You never told me you'd stopped seeing her.
> Are you talking about Betty?
> Well I didnt know you were seeing anybody else!
> Mm ... Tammas looked away. (*C* 82)

These two episodes from *A Chancer* 'follow' each other in the narrative, but their relationship, if any, is one of contiguity rather than causality. Within each section lurk unanswered questions. In the first, if not because of the "dough" then because of what? In the second, why does Margaret shake her head? These explanatory gaps are supplemented by a momentary aporia as the reader attempts to negotiate the deictic shift between the first episode and the second. Noticeably, there are no apparent temporal indicators; the second section might be hours later, a day later, and so on. Further, within this latter section, it is not immediately clear either who is speaking nor indeed to whom. Speakers are not initially identified and the reader is only certain of the owner of the spoken words as the narrative unfolds. Recalling Barthes, the "Aye" and "Fuck sake" in the exchange between Tammas and McCann indicates a repositioning of language nearer to speech, whilst in the exchange between Tammas and Margaret, words and their speaker(s) are not only "reunited", but by the absence of quotation marks they are effectively merged. It is only when Tammas looks away that this convergence lapses with the introduction of the third person. However, in both segments the third person noticeably articulates only such information as cannot be conveyed through speech and here, as throughout the novel, the third person is restricted to the conveying of external activities. In the example above, McCann frowns, Tammas continues, Margaret shakes her head, Tammas looks away. This restriction actuates the cleansed, non-judgemental narrative which we outlined in chapter one, where the narrator does not intercede to make up for any perceived informational deficiencies, but in so doing, it leaves those gaps and uncertainties which permeate the existential world thus allowing the bringing forth and maintenance of both density and ambiguity. To sustain this climate there are no adjectives, only processional verbs. Adjectives and superfluous nouns, anything which describes, anything which might enclose events and persons, cordoning off the possible by imprisoning the grammatical subject in an eternal description, are omitted. Verbs however, particularly as they are deployed here, give an impression of activity and fluidity, recalling the familiar Sartrean tenet: to be is to do. Within *A Chancer*, 'doing' always takes precedence over having. Additionally, verbs maintain the narrative within a factual domain: either someone is moving, speaking, frowning, or they are not.

Adjectives however, such as 'fat', 'thin', 'stupid' possess and transmit a judgement but importantly an extrinsic judgement, they rely upon an observer/narrator. In a traditional third-person narrative these adjectives are provided by the narrator. For an existential novelist adjectives are to be avoided because they introduce a sense of aloofness and separation, where the narrator effectuates a breach, positioning himself apart from his or her characters - here we should recall that it is exactly this idea of a narrative viewpoint *sub specie aeternitatis* that causes Sartre to criticise Mauriac.[15] In relating only facts, detailing only activities, and in rejecting adjectival description, we are effectively left alone with Tammas, who is not so much a character as a centre of activity, a movement.

> what affects us, what persists in our memory, what appears as essential and irreducible to vague intellectual concepts are the gestures themselves, the objects, the movements, and the outlines.[16]

A Chancer, because it deals only with what can be observed, constitutes a novel of "gestures" and "outlines". Within the text, cause and reason, a certain explanatory depth, are notable absentees. The connecting thread of narrative progression is gone. Preferring activity to experience, psychological motivation or explanation is banished, and replaced by a prose confined to the surface; a prose which has refused the penetrative urge, for getting to the heart of either things, or Tammas himself, would entail a focus upon essence. Kelman, like Barthes, like Robbe-Grillet, rejects this essentialising movement but not for all and only all the same reasons. *A Chancer* declines essentialism in favour of a depiction of existential subjectivity in all its aporetic ambiguity. For Robbe-Grillet, a descriptive 'scientific' narrative is practised in order to obviate a humanizing or anthropomorphic gaze which falsely bestows meaning upon things. Kelman's text opts to remain resolutely existential. If it employs a zero degree narrative mode, it is to close off the possibility of judgement, of fixing character, rather than to arrive at a purely 'scientific' narration. The novel provides fact, but fact in an existential way: about an individual, in an individual situation and therefore *A Chancer* retains the subject which Robbe-Grillet urges the new novelist to

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[15]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'François Mauriac and Freedom', p.15.
[16]Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, 1963, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989)), p.20.

abjure. If we do not enter Tammas, it is because only Tammas as a first person narrator can relate the machinations of his own consciousness. Again, there is a prior Sartrean source, for this method of narration replicates the procedure of existential phenomenology.

> Being will be disclosed to us by some kind of immediate access - boredom, nausea, etc., and ontology will be the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself; that is, without intermediary. (*BN* xxiv)

Being is described as it is manifest, in its moods and activities, without prejudice, without an "intermediary". Thus the tense is always now, no past and no future ensure that the individual and 'meaning' are never totalised, never wholly coincident. The upset temporal trajectory is made vivid through Tammas who reads "yesterday's *Daily Record*" (*C* 206))or "tomorrow morning's *Daily Record*" (*C* 137) or the "following morning's *Sunday Mail*" (*C* 148): never the paper of the day. An existentialist would agree with Robbe-Grillet that no meaning inheres in the world, in objects, but would disagree that this is where the story ends. There is meaning, but it is not discovered rather it is manufactured, placed there by an individual consciousness - something which becomes accentuated in Patrick Doyle's appropriation of electricians' pipes as musical instruments which do not mean or signify until Patrick intends them as musical instruments. Man's freedom is the source of the world's meaning. Thus de Beauvoir differentiates between an absurd world (she has Camus in mind) and an ambiguous world: "To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won."[17] The novel charts Tammas quest for meaning through lowly jobs and unsatisfying relationships, but his rejection of these ensures that constitution of self is never found in either an occupation or a relation. Furthermore if we consider how we encounter another, through their observable states, their physical activities, their gestures, their speech, - what Sartre terms 'conduct' (*BN* 4)- then we can 'know' them in a sense but, given that meaning and identity are processes, such knowledge is necessarily partial and

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[17]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 1948, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), p.129.

always incomplete. We can only accompany or observe, we can never place ourselves wholly in the position of another. Hence although the narrator shadows Tammas, only on occasion do we have any suggestion of knowledge from the inside. As Anna Boschetti notes, in Sartre's narrative technique, "focusing on a point of view allows one to mimic the conscious vision with all its limits or the enigmatic effect of a vision from the outside."[18] For Sartre, as for Kelman, "[i]t is not a matter of defining passions and unpredictable acts, still less of explaining them (in novels, even the best psychological analyses have a mouldy smell), but rather of *presenting* them."[19] Sartre's idea here of an uncontaminated presentation is the aesthetic premise which drives *A Chancer*:

> It wasn't a possibility to get inside Tammas' head. Again, I wanted to show things, to demonstrate them. To show necessities. The novel isn't written from his viewpoint so much as from over his shoulder. I can only show how people are in the way they react and respond to him. I can't induce a conversation so that he can say "What happened to you?" so some sort of individual history can emerge [...] If you're sticking to writing as well as you can that means not interfering. If somebody doesn't tell something to somebody else in my story, I can't jump in and be Nabokov and say "Tell it to me".[20]

The reactions and responses to which Kelman refers correspond to Sartre's 'conducts', and the informational deficiencies correspond to the absence of a total position in which the world and everything in it can have an explicable resolution. Induced conversations halt the narrative because they turn from activity to reflection and explanation. In existentialism, the subject, the *pour-soi* or Dasein is first and foremost an active subject. The author too must avoid interference with his characters for the same reason. Authorial reflection if it is introduced to alleviate or fill in any gaps is a form of bad faith. Such a style of writing therefore throws back to the reader his own partial experience of the world. Since the reader is forced to deduce or

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[18]Anna Boschetti, 'Sartre and the Age of the American Novel', trans. Maria-Teresa Vanderboegh and David Vanderboegh, in eds. Jean-François Fournay and Charles D Minahen, *Situating Sartre in Twentieth-Century Thought and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1997), pp. 71-92, p. 75.

[19]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'François Mauriac and Freedom', *Literary Essays*, pp.7-23, pp.7-8.

[20]Kirsty McNeill, 'James Kelman Interviewed', p.7.

impose significance, to negotiate these gaps and absences, reading the novel re-enacts the 'reading' of the world, the encounter of the world, and induces the dialogue of freedoms mentioned in chapter one.

In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes discusses the texts of Céline, revealing a pivotal narrative component to the fiction of the latter:

> In Céline's work [...] writing is not at the service of thought, like some successfully realistic décor tacked on to the description of a social sub-class; it really represents the author's descent into the sticky opacity of the condition which he is describing. (68)

Whilst Kelman would not be happy were his writing to be described as a "descent" (Kelman as author has a relationship of solidarity with his narrated events, something arguably lacking in Céline), the entry into the "sticky opacity", a notably Sartrean locution, of the protagonist's condition serves as an outline of Kelman's narrative. *A Chancer* also lacks the relation of "service to thought" since through the predominance of the third person, Tammas' thoughts stay within Tammas. This lack of access helps to suggest that it is not an epistemological possibility to grasp essence at a human level, it is not possible to say what a human life is whilst it is still being lived, since a transcendent position is not existentially possible. Hence like all Kelman's novels *A Chancer* has no definite ending. The novel simply stops with Tammas hitching a lift. The driver whom he meets is going to London but it is unclear whether or not Tammas intends going there; indeed it is unclear whether or not Tammas is actually going to accept the lift. This lack of clear resolution opens up the future and maintains, albeit tentatively, the possible. As Merleau-Ponty has it "as long as we are alive, our situation is open".[21] Life has 'meaning' only when it is over and can be converted into a past tense narrative: "At the moment of death *we* are." (*BN* 115). If *A Chancer* ends as suddenly, as randomly, as it begins, it is to suggest that true closure in an existential text would only be possible with death. Until then, all that is available are episodes, and episodes are therefore the primary structural technique of the novel. Through this a typography wherein there are no chapters, only

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[21]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.442.

episodes of varying length, is converted into an existential one. To indicate an episodic shift, Kelman uses an enlarged parenthesis rather in the manner that Céline uses an extended line in *Journey to the End of the Night*. These typographical techniques upset sequentiality and work to unsettle progressive efficacy: events become irreducible moments which fail to cohere around a consistent, progressive plot. *A Chancer* is incremental, a continual restatement of the same for as Ann Jefferson indicates, the traditional novel has a teleology, and thus is constructed in reverse[22]. If one relies upon this tradition of plotting, then the end is already known to the story-teller; the tale is effectively delivered in the past tense. An existential text needs to avoid this. Although Jefferson is speaking of the *nouveau roman*, her comments recall Sartre's criticism of François Mauriac:

> The definitive judgements with which M. Mauriac is always ready to intersperse the narrative prove that he does not conceive his characters as he ought. He fabricates their natures before setting them down, he decrees that they will be this or that.[23]

For the existentialist, character should be shown to be self-generating. Mauriac shuts off this possibility because his characters are already determined before they are set down. Existing is a becoming. What an existentialist novelist must attempt is a character who proceeds by choice or by chance.

However, here we have one of the central problems of existential fiction: can one ever really represent chance within narrative? In his study of the role of chance in British fiction[24], Leland Monk describes how chance has been relegated by a scientific or philosophical epistemology which seeks to enshrine order, certainty and necessity as metaphysical desiderata. Using Foucault to describe how "chance inhabits the periphery of whatever frame of power-knowledge is in place"(4-5), Monk argues that "chance always takes on a necessarily fateful quality once it is represented in narrative". Although a text may contain or attempt to deploy chance events these will

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[22]Ann Jefferson, *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 30.
[23]Jean-Paul Sartre, 'François Mauriac and Freedom', *Literary Essays*, pp.15-16.
[24]Leland Monk, *Standard Deviations: Chance and the Modern British Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

be ultimately 'normalised' since they are located within a narrative. Each time the narrative is read, events take on a necessary, fated order. The title of his work, *Standard Deviations*, therefore uses a statistical term to convey what he reads as the "oxymoronic" phrase 'chance in narrative'. He therefore concludes that although there is a "history" to the ongoing attempt to do so, "no novelist actually manages to represent chance in narrative". (9) What Monk misses however is that whilst novelistic events are *ultimately* normalised by the reading of a narrative, this is only true after the *initial* reading. An existential narrative only needs show the operation of chance or freedom the *first* time it is read, for only if read *again* do things, characters, events, seem predetermined. Reading *A Chancer*, or *Nausea* or *The Outsider*, becomes an experience analogous to the life of the existential subject. Whilst reading, the words which we have read, effectively the past life of the text, become the in-itself, but those segments as yet unread constitute an open future. In the *first* reading of the novel this future is unknown; as readers we can only guess what events will occur or how the narrative subject will proceed or choose, but these moments cannot have a fateful quality because as readers, we do not know how or indeed if, the novel will 'end'. In this way, the initial reading of the novel mimics the life of an individual. Here we can refer to and apply Kierkegaard's famous criticism of Hegel. Understanding, and with it the attribution of p therefore q, is a retrospective activity, but life, narrative, is lived forwards.

Monk's text restricts itself to George Eliot, Conrad and Joyce, but the problem of evading determinism in narrative is, not only a problem with which Kelman's novel contends: the problem also saturates the writing of those whom Kelman mentions as influences; particularly 'Russian' fiction of the nineteenth century. Here we find a number of important precedents for both *A Chancer* and for Kelman's fictions when taken as a whole, for here we find the consistent employment of techniques designed to unsettle literary tradition, particularly as regards plot and narrative style, but importantly, this reappraisal of fictional procedure is undertaken in order to introduce into the novel both chance and its approximate correlate, contingency.

In her essay 'Against Dryness', Iris Murdoch asserts that it is the Russians who are the "great masters of the contingent"[25] and she laments that something of this has been lost. Murdoch maintains that the issues with which Russian fiction engages, the problems it highlights, develops and works through, have been displaced due to the dominance of an empirico-utilitarian schema which seeks to evacuate precisely that which makes human life human - hence her charge that a certain 'dryness' permeates contemporary writing. Her essay accordingly presses for a return to the issues with which nineteenth-century Russian fiction contends and these coalesce around the notion of contingency. The novel should not concern itself with an abstract human condition, where theory ensures that everything and everyone may be accommodated; instead it should concentrate upon "real various individuals struggling in society" (291). Therefore although not uncritical of the existential tradition, Murdoch shares the existential idea that literature can rediscover and re-articulate this lost "density". In order to do so, fiction, and one presumes philosophy itself, must re-accept contingency, but consequently it must appreciate that which typifies Russian writing of the nineteenth century: the realisation that reality is not a "given whole". (294) Literature she argues, must "not be too much afraid of incompleteness". (295) Now as we have seen, Kelman's fiction meets these criteria in various ways. The episodic structure, the lack of closure and the frequent gaps in what is available to the reader ensure that a totalised narrative is never achieved: there is no whole. This helps to achieve the ambiguity and density which Murdoch mentions, and noticeably Murdoch's promotion of density coincides with and repeats both part of Barthes' programme for zero degree writing, and also a key tenet of Sartre's committed literature. The ideas to which Murdoch alludes receive a fuller analysis in an essay by Gary Saul Morson[26]. Again the issues raised here are of considerable relevance in understanding Kelman's prose. In his essay, Morson argues that Russian writers of

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[25]Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp. 287-95, p. 295. References in parenthesis hereafter.

[26]Gary Saul Morson, 'Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century Novel', in eds. Malcolm V Jones and Robin Feuer Miller, *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 150-168. References in parentheses. My discussion of the technical and philosophical bases of Russsian fiction both here and throughout draws heavily on this essay.

the nineteenth century - he discusses Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in the main - move against the traditional novel and they do so because they detect an implicit determinism in its construction. It is this which Morson describes as the great insight of Russian fiction. Moreover, he agrees with Murdoch that what we might term the 'classic' Russian novel militates against the representation of ideas *in abstacto*, and instead operates upon a casuist[27] principle, where the individual is presented and examined in his or her particular environment. Russian fiction looks at individual 'cases'. As an example here, consider *Crime and Punishment* or *A Hero of our Time*. In the former, where Raskolnikov is the principal case, to underline this the word "casuistry" recurs several times whilst in the latter, the author's preface (later employed by Camus as an epigram to *A Happy Death*) makes clear that the impending tale is based upon casuist principles whereby the individual becomes a particular universal. Clearly translatable into Kierkegaardian terms, the Russian novel seeks to render individual life rather than simply manipulate characters to conform to a predetermined theory. In so doing, Russian fiction becomes what Morson calls 'prosaics', by which he intends a mode of writing "deeply suspicious of the claim of theory to accommodate the world" . Instead, prosaics, "sees the life of individuals and society as fraught with contingency, which operates not just at grand historical junctures but also at every moment of our daily lives" (159). This concern with the diurnal impacts upon plot, since if what is real are the ordinary events which the traditional novel either neglects or seeks to place in a structured determined nexus, then the novel needs to alter and depict instead what has hitherto seemed marginal or inconsequential: those incidences in the life of an individual which History ignores. Hence Tolstoy's contention that Raskolnikov's 'real' life is not to be found in his formulation of theories, but when he simply lies on his couch thinking over ordinary events. (161)

This reformulation of the real impinges upon and calls for a revision of narrative technique. Morson identifies three traditional fictional procedures which the Russian novel attacks and to some extent, these portend and can be seen to connect with the

[27]Casuistry, from the Latin '*casus*', case, was originally used to mean applied ethics. Although it now carries a pejorative sense, Morson uses the term to describe "reasoning by cases".

projects of Barthes, Robbe-Grillet and Sartre which were outlined above. The first of these is foreshadowing. This is rejected because it posits a causal frame whereby earlier events cause those which occur later, with the result that character freedom becomes illusory since the reader is presented with signs of an already composed future. So too the structure of the novel requires redefinition and modification if it is to accommodate and bring forth something of the contingency and chance which operate in the world. Lastly, closure is to be avoided since it makes narrated events both teleological and resolvable; gaps and loose ends, inextricable components of the everyday, are eliminated. These conventional mainstays then are what prose must exclude. Morson detects two principal aesthetic responses to these problems which he terms 'creation by potential' and 'sideshadowing'.

Creation by potential ensures that the temporal scheme of the novel flows forward only. It leaves a narrative in which there are loose ends (164). Sideshadowing generates counter-possibilities and leaves a permanent 'could have been otherwise' to narrated events. Morson describes sideshadowing as the opposite of foreshadowing, sideshadowing "conveys the sense that time is open and that each moment contains real alternatives" (164). Both techniques convey clearly existential positions. Within an existential narrative, the future must be open because it is yet to be decided, it will only come to be through the conscious projection of an individual into it through the selection of an alternative or possibility. Prolepses are rejected because they convert the flux and fluidity of being into an already determined causal sequence. So too closure which implies a resolution of narrated events. Time must be made fluid rather than static or progressive: nothing in human reality (with the exception of death) is inevitable and there is a constant incompleteness which invades being. Chance, contingency, the daily life of the individual, form the narrative stock of Kelman's novel, but as technical and typographical moves the techniques and concerns of Russian fiction have their correspondence in Tammas himself.

Though both the novel's title and a friend of Vi describe Tammas as 'a chancer'(*C* 286), this is then not an ascription of essence nor even a typification of character.

> A character - everyone knows what the word means. It is not a banal *he*, anonymous and transparent, the simple subject of the action expressed by the verb. A character must have a proper name, two if possible: a surname and a given name. He must have parents, a heredity. He must have a profession. If he has possessions as well, so much the better. Finally, he must possess a "character", a face which reflects it, a past which has molded that face and that character. His character dictates his actions, makes him react to each event in a determined fashion. His character permits the reader to judge him, to love him, to hate him. (*For a New Novel* 27)

Here Robbe-Grillet summarises what the new novel fashions itself against, but within the rejection of the traditions of character-based novels, we can glimpse too the imperatives identified with Russian fiction and we can reconvey all these points as adumbrating an existential position. Human reality has to found itself, but it has to found itself in accordance with what it is, and paradoxically what it is is what it is not. Since human reality is freedom, being 'a chancer' reveals a being open to the future and this future comes literally from nothing. Tammas attempts to structure his life in accordance with the narrative principle of creation by potential, which in turn corresponds to the existential idea of projection. Therefore within *A Chancer* we are given almost no information which enables us to 'fix' Tammas. He is never described, never presented as a set of physical properties, all we know of him are his actions, and his first name, which is itself frequently declined in favour of Robbe-Grillet's transparent 'he'. Significant too is his age: he reveals to Vi that he is twenty, two years younger than he originally claimed. (*C* 229) This strategy of partial anonymity locates Kelman's novel in a series which includes Robbe-Grillet's own texts, and Sarraute's *Portrait of A Man Unknown* but with Kelman, traces of Kafka are ever present. In *The Trial* and *The Castle*, Kafka's heroes surnames are reduced to the initial 'K', *A Chancer* simultaneously extends and percolates this: Tammas simply has none. He has no surname, no *family* name, "no parents, no heredity", but he also has no home of his own. Ungrounded, he lives with his sister and brother-in-law. This ungroundedness is a crucial aspect of existentialism for in her study of the ambiguous, de Beauvoir states that "on the earthly plane, a life which does not seek to ground itself will be a pure contingency"[28]. To intensify this groundlessness, his contingency,

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[28]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p.16.

Tammas parents are never mentioned, thereby suggesting that there is no 'reason' or antecedent cause for his being. Tammas is presented to us having skipped a generation; his sole contact with his predecessors is with his grandmother with whom, in a foreshadowing of Patrick Doyle's difficulties with his mother, father and brother, he can scarcely communicate.

These genealogical lacunae and communicative difficulties disrupt the notion of a smooth causal nexus, of a connected world, but also they preclude the ability to trace or locate Tammas as either proceeding from or belonging to. He cannot be classified. Taken together with the episodic structure, Tammas lack of ancestry produces in fictional form what Sartre terms "being without any relation to a "before"". (*BN* 207) Thus when Tammas states "it had come from nothing, and that was the only point" (*C* 62) this not only applies to the money accrued from gambling but to his own contingent ontological makeup. Tammas himself proceeds from nothing, from chance; he is simply there. This is the Heideggerian thrownness which is forever present in Kelman's work. Additionally however, this simultaneously establishes Tammas as a paradigm of what Robbe-Grillet terms the "future hero", for it is precisely Heidegger's idea of thrown Dasien which informs Robbe-Grillet's distinction between two types of literary protagonist. For Robbe-Grillet, the hero of the traditional novel is "projected into an immaterial and unstable *elsewhere*" whilst the hero of the future "will remain, on the contrary *there*."[29] Within *A Chancer*, the absence of direct ancestry combines with Kelman's eschewal of historical detail and his persistent use of the present tense to generate a narrative concerned with the here, the now and the always possible, the chances which constitutes the future.

So far we have examined the means through which chance and contingency impinge upon novelistic construction and emplotment. We have seen that Kelman takes from the new novel and Russian writing various existentially appropriable fictional methods. My elaboration of Russian fiction though has had another purpose, for the poetry, novels and short stories of its primary practitioners bequeath not only a methodology but also a theme, the issues arising from which this methodology helps

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[29]Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, p. 22.

to express: that theme is gambling. Gaming, chancing, gambling make constant appearances in the work of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Lermontov, Dostoevsky. As Jurij Lotman[30] shows, cards and card games, and thereby issues of fate and chance, free will and determinism, so dominated nineteenth-century Russian fiction, that their introduction into a text made the development of the piece somewhat predictable. (458)

> The theme of the card game introduces chance - an unpredictable course of events - into the mechanism of the plot and into the link between the motives of the hero and the results of his actions. Chance becomes both the mechanism of the plot and the subject of the hero's and author's deliberations. [...] One of the consequences of this mechanism of the plot is the characterisation of the hero as a man of will, who strives amid the turbulent movement of surrounding life to achieve an aim which he has set himself. (473-4)

Lotman sees the pre-eminence of chance as articulated through this fictional concern with gambling as a both a product and exemplification of a conflict. The conflict he describes - theoretical models against individual reality - is crucial here, for it is one which is also basic to existentialism. *Crime and Punishment* pictures this conflict between theory and actuality, between a predetermined conception which attempts to explain all that is or will be and the individualised reality, the singular 'I' who undercuts it. As Raskolnikov's tormentor Porfiry points out,

> the general case, the one all our legal rules and formalities are designed for and the one on the basis of which they're all worked out and written into legal textbooks, simply doesn't exist, for the very good reason that every case, every crime, if you like, as soon as it takes place in reality, turns into a thoroughly special case.[31]

The narrator of *The Gambler* tells how "reason is not enough" for "one turn of the wheel and everything can be different"[32] Gambling becomes a means of enacting this collision. It becomes the model for the individual against the system. Lotman

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[30]Jurij M Lotman, 'Theme and Plot: The Theme of Cards and the Card Game in Russian Literature of the Nineteenth Century', *PTL* 3 (1978), 455-492.
[31]Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 1865-6, trans. David McDuff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.400.
[32]Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Gambler/Bobok/A Nasty Story*, trans. Jessie Coulson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) p.99, p.153.

therefore sees the card game, and a general fictional usage of gambling, as a model of what he terms a 'conflict situation' pointing out that "games of chance are constructed in such a way that the punter is required to take decisions when he actually has little or no information to help him" (462) The symbolism of the game of chance functions then as a model of "man's struggle with Unknown Factors" (462) We have then one side of the symbolism of cards and of gambling: a world reduced to the contingent, a world without foundation and without explication into which the individual is plunged and in which the individual must act. David Parlett, in his explanation of the starting procedure for a card game, helps to further outline their analogous ontological symbolism.

> Because cards are shuffled before play, the opening position of a card game is always unpredictable (because governed by chance), unknown (because players can only see the backs of one another's cards), and unequal (because some may be dealt a better hand than others).[33]

Cards are shuffled, therefore their position within a set of fifty-two is entirely contingent, what cards a player receives is a matter of chance. We have then a particular contingency, but also a facticity. The cards one receives one receives by chance, but once they are dealt they become factic: one can, to use a gambling metaphor, only play (act) with what one is (contingently) dealt. Notice too the epistemological element. Knowledge is incomplete, one player knows only what cards he or she holds: opponents and their cards become the unknowable Other, all that one player sees of another is surface. A card game then, when translated into an existential position, becomes a model of a situation which is indicative of the need for choice and illustrative too of the prevalent contingency in and through which this choice must be made.

Gambling conceived along these lines enacts a metaphysical duel between the individual and the world as understood existentially. It becomes an existential confrontation in that it depicts the lone individual placed within a contingent set of circumstances in which he must make decisions, in which he must act. Tammas' endless visits to the casino or the racetrack represent an entry into this existential

[33]David Parlett, *A History of Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

universe. The casino exists as a microcosm reflecting the general experience of the individual in a society. Tammas as punter must play against the house without ever being able to ascertain what odds are ranged against him, whether the roulette wheel is fixed, whether the cards for poker or *chemin de fer* are marked, whether he will win or whether he will lose. Drew Milne links this to commodity fetishism "in a life- world dominated by the casino-economy of the stock exchange"[34] but this reading downplays the existential issues which gambling fiction divulges. Tammas inhabits a world which has certain economic conditions but these are factical, not determinative. Tammas chooses in and against this background, which as an individual, he can never fully see. His gamble, his act, is always made into the unknown.

There is however another facet to cards and this is their use as instruments of prediction, their use in cartomancy. The Greek noun *tychē* usually rendered as 'fortune' simultaneously conveys both of these meanings: fate mingles with chance under the cover of fortune.[35] The cards then only reveal what is to come, fated, what is always already determined. Thus cards instantiate a paradox: on the one hand symbols of chance on the other symbols of necessity. In an exchange in *Simpson's Bar*, Tammas and Billy are playing Roper and McCann at dominoes.

> Auld Roper
> shook his head: The luck yous two are carrying! Jesus Christ Almighty
> I wish yous'd fucking fill in my coupon - eh! Lucky pair of . . .! He
> sniffed and reached for his tumbler.
> Skill, said Tammas
> Skill! Skill! That's a bloody good yin right enough. Eh McCann?
> D'you hear him? Skill for fuck sake! He wouldnt know what skill was
> if it jumped up and punched him one on the fucking chin! (*C* 83)

Here luck and skill are explicitly contrasted. Luck exemplifies chance, Tammas' win becomes an accident; whereas skill entails fate, Tammas' winning could not have been

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[34]Drew Milne, 'James Kelman: Dialectics of Urbanity', p.402.

[35]Annabel Davis-Goff in the introduction to her anthology of gambling literature notes that "gambling seems to have developed from the use of chance to know the will of the gods and to seek their advice and assistance". Ed. Annabel Davis-Goff, *The Literary Companion to Gambling: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), p. xvii.

otherwise. Tammas identifies himself with skill and therefore with determination, but Roper identifies his win with chance. Vi too, reports a conversation where it is stated that Tammas carries "a bit of luck" (*C* 148) and of course the title of the novel suggests that we should identify Tammas with chance. This interplay indicates a familiar Sartrean position: "In one sense choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose." (*EH* 48) Existential freedom is paradoxical in that one is 'condemned' to it. Both world and self are structured according to these seemingly exclusive polarities, the determined and the free.

> I mean that's what you forget, that's the bloody consequence Tammas, that's what you don't think about [...] See that punting of yours! and couple it with the broo! Well I'll tell you something; you're beat before you start. Christ, I dont like saying it, before you even start. (*C* 115-6)

Within this passage fate, being beat before one starts, is placed aside punting, a means of manipulating odds, generating a return, creating a chance for oneself. Chancing is necessary because it projects Tammas out of the world of habit, of "Saturday night routine" (*C* 15), of endless visits to the bookies or *Simpson's Bar* where the response to the question 'what's happening?' is a resounding "nothing" (*C* 13) This is the life on the margin, life on the 'broo', a narrow circle of opportunity. McCorquodale takes Tammas' position to be inevitable, fated, because Tammas possesses neither the footballing skills of his friend Danny nor the ability to maintain employment for any sustained period. He lacks too any (desire for) education. All the traditional routes of working-class 'emancipation' are wholly absent. But within this constricted world, Tammas acts, gambles, to reduce its determining properties: what the novel implies is that within the factical given, gambling represents a sole freedom, the only available salve for what Douglas Gifford terms the "sterility of the unemployed soul."[36] In *A Chancer*, gambling becomes a means of resistance, a way of exhibiting and retaining ontological fluidity. McCorquodale is therefore wrong. Tammas needs his "punting" if he is to disengage from a fragmented social world of ennui and repetition and manifest his freedom; but in another way McCorquodale is right: Tammas does not consider the consequences, for it is the act that matters, not the outcome.

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[36]Douglas Gifford, 'The Authentic Glasgow Experience: James Kelman's *A Chancer*', *Books in Scotland*, no.19 (Autumn 1985), p.10.

These problematics are re-presented through the constant horse and dog racing where Tammas muses that "the night could yet turn into something." (*C* 58). Inside the nomenclature of the pundit abide correlates of the existential themes we have been tracing. Dogs run from traps and some animals run with handicaps. These correspond to the broadly factic, the world. Within each race there are favourites and of course outsiders, with the latter occasionally violating expectations. Betting itself generates a profusion of choice. There are odds, expectancies, sudden losses and unexpected winners: there is always the chance that the outsider may prevail. But what happens then if the favourite loses? What has occurred? Chance, or fate? These issues receive their first philosophical interrogation in pre-socratic thought. Chance and the free will and determinism debate assumes a place in philosophy with Democritus and Epicurus[37].

For Democritus, all events have causal antecedents and it follows therefore that nothing is contingent. All that is *is* because of necessity. Epicurus attempts to refute this with his notion of the *clinamen*, or sudden swerve. Whilst agreeing with Democritus that everything consists of atoms, Epicurus argues that although atoms move through space in a regulated manner, an individual atom may unexpectedly swerve and collide with the others. This is what he terms the *clinamen*. Relating this to *A Chancer*, we can see that *clinamen* is reflected at the twin levels of form and content. We have already discussed the intrusion of contingency within the narrative, the abrupt episodic shifts, but this sudden inexplicability can also be traced in the events which the narrative relates. "It was just a change; I just felt like a change." (*C* 299) This locution depicts the translation of cognition into action but importantly sudden action, action which seems inexplicable when the reader attempts to posit a determining antecedent event. This movement, which is a mainstay of both *A Hero of Our Time* and *Crime and Punishment*[38] is exemplified throughout *A Chancer*. One example is at Billy's wedding.

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[37]My discussion here draws on the entry for 'chance' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ed. Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (London: Macmillan. 1967), ii, pp.73-4.

[38]In Lermontov's novel, the narrator of the first part meets Pechorin by chance, Pechorin attends Princess Mary's ball by chance and by chance he overhears

A moment later Alec shrugged. Anyway, they're about to stick the records on. All the Scottish stuff first but they'll be dancing after that.

Tammas nodded.

It'll be a good laugh.

Aye. I'll just have a quick pint.

You'll come up but?

Aye, course.

Okay. Billy was wondering where you were as well.

I'll just be a minute tell him.

Okay.

Tammas turned immediately, left the close, crossing in the direction of the pub, but he carried on walking beyond it. A taxi had pulled to a stop at the traffic lights; he rushed up to it and climbed in. The driver was waiting for him to speak. Sorry, he said, Shawfield, Shawfield jimmy.

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There had been a slight flurry of snow when they boarded the bus and now, as they alighted, it was coming down quite thickly and beginning to lie. (*C* 226-7)

The irruption of chance in the narrated events is clearly seen here. As he exits the wedding and takes the taxi, Tammas becomes a *clinamen*. Significantly, no reason is given as to why Tammas leaves the wedding: he just does. No explanation, no reason, leaves an *un*caused event, and such motiveless and random acts populate the narrative. These sudden swerves which correspond to the gambling act are Tammas' means of challenging the inevitable, of rendering open slight avenues of possibility, and again this quest for freedom is metaphorically enacted at the races.

He reached the wall dividing the track from the enclosure and stared about. The busfare home was not essential. It was not a bad evening, mild. The busfare would give him a bet. Coupled with the cash returned him by the conductor he had enough for a twenty pence bet on the tote, twice the minimum. He could stick the whole lot on a dog.

Grushnitsky's plot to ridicule him through a fixed duel. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov kills Lizaveta because by chance she is at the home of the money-lender when he arrives to commit the murder. Raskolnikov finds himself in strange streets by chance, and the adverb 'suddenly' occurs on almost every page.

> Or split it two way, 10 on the 2nd race and 10 on the 3rd. Or keep the 20 pence for the nap he had chosen; it would be racing in the 4th. Or a forecast, a 10 pence reverse forecast. Or even a place-only bet of 20 pence. No need even to dig out a winner, just one to finish in the first two. [...] The place-only bet was correct, it was the correct thing to do. And so what if the dog actually won the race [...] it would not matter, it made no difference whether it won or was second, just so long as it was placed [...] He was standing amongst the small crowd directly beneath the row of bookies, checking the form for the race, studying times and weights and distances. Yet it would not matter. The dog he decided on would either be placed or not. What dog did not make any difference. (*C* 59-60)

In this passage, betting possibilities - signified by the repeated "or"- multiply almost endlessly and point to the use of the narrative technique of sideshadowing discussed above. Here, the certainty of the busfare is exchanged for the uncertainty of a possible future, but this is not a totally open future since it contains only two live possibilities: either the dog will be placed or it will not. Choice is not completely open, but dependent upon the situation in which one finds oneself. What this stresses is that the important thing is to choose, decide. Therefore and noticeably, Tammas eschews excessive analysis as a valuable method of prediction. As Sartre points out:

> voluntary deliberation is always a deception. How can I evaluate causes and motives on which I myself confer their value before all deliberation and by the very choice which I make of myself? The illusion here stems from the fact that we endeavour to take causes and motives for entirely transcendent things which I balance in my hands like weights and which possess a weight as a permanent property. Yet on the other hand we try to view them as contents of consciousness, and this is self-contradictory. Actually causes and motives have only the weight which my project - *i.e.*, the free production of the end of the known act to be realized - confers upon them. When I deliberate, the chips are down. (*BN* 450-1)

The chips are down, *les jeux sans fait*, this gambling locution from *Being and Nothingness* becomes a screenplay about determinism,[39] but it points here to the uselessness of utilitarian deliberation. Tammas tells Rab at one stage that "I just want to have it all in front of me at the time [...] see how I'm fixed for everything" (*C* 15) but in human life no such situation arises. Knowledge is always incomplete, tentative,

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[39]Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Chips are Down*, trans. Louise Varése (London: Rider, 1951).

thus the possible, what is to be, appears not through acts of deliberation but from individual decision. The absence of the certain yokes responsibility and such personal decision together. Thus by the end of the novel, Tammas realises that "it was not possible to do everything. You need to make your selection and stick to it. There was nothing else you could do. There was nothing else, nothing at all. A mistake even to think like that." (*C* 296) One cannot have everything or know everything because things only come to be through choice, "selection". Deliberation implies that the future can be known, predicted, but within Sartrean existentialism, value, like the future, is made and not found. What will be will be in accordance with the constitutive choices which make up the project of the for-itself.[40]

In response to a question from Kirsty McNeill, Kelman declares that the "subculture" of the gambling world holds out a route of escape for those such as Tammas.[41] As I have suggested, Kelman's novel intimates that gambling is the only avenue of freedom open to men like Tammas, but gambling also suggests diversion. The reference here is of course to Pascal whose own fragmented and incomplete text, *Pensées*, advances the theory of gambling as *divertissement*. Pascal himself was deeply interested in the problem of the cycloid, the roulette wheel, and Halliday and Fuller recount that Pascal's involvement with the seventeenth century gambler, Le Chevalier de Méré led to a fascination with dice and gambling.[42] Pascal also provides a proto-existential diagnostic. Here gambling is not seen as a positive symbol of existential ontology, but an indication of an existential malaise. Man needs diversion because he is unhappy and for Pascal this discomfort proceeds from a central issue. The difficulty is in realising that "I am not a necessary being. I am not eternal or infinite either."[43] Pascal thus

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[40]Charles Taylor criticises Sartrean existentialism, arguing that this groundlessness of choice is incoherent. Taylor himself prefers the Heideggerian version. See his 'Responsibility for Self' in ed. Gary Watson, *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.111-126.

[41]Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', p.8.

[42]See Alban Krailsheimer, *Pascal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.10, p.14 and Eds. John Halliday and Peter Fuller, *The Psychology of Gambling* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p.1.

[43]Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A J Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 67.

proposes contingency as a stimulant; awareness of one's non-necessity creates unhappiness, to relieve this unhappiness one seeks a diversion:

> The only good thing for men therefore is to be diverted from thinking of what they are, either by some occupation which takes their mind of it, or by some novel and agreeable passion which keeps them busy, like gambling, hunting, some absorbing show, in short by what is called diversion. (67-8).

Gambling becomes what Pascal terms a 'created target', an imagined telos seemingly substituting the contingency of the real for a continually differed imagined 'if'. As an activity then gambling provides an illusion of purpose whilst simultaneously registering precisely the contingency, the absence of essence, which the gambler seeks to elude. The world of the gambler is a world without guarantee, but each time the gambling act is worked, contingency re-enters, once again presents itself. Here gambling seems to function as a mask. It paradoxically conceals the contingency which entails freedom.

Perhaps the most famous gamble however is Pascal's wager. As *Crime and Punishment* illustrates an essentially Pascalian gamble, Raskolnikov gambles on faith, *The Outsider* and *A Chancer* place themselves on the opposite side. They are atheistic existential challenges to Pascal's wager. Man must make himself in a world without God and both novels suggest that this is problematic, for the societal structures which provide the frame in which such choice must be made are like odds stacked in the house's favour. In Camus' novel when Meursault is put on trial, the prosecutor, as representative of the system and thus of society, seems not only to try Meursault, but also seems to impugn chance itself.

> Raymond said that it was quite by chance that I happened to be at the beach. The prosecutor then asked him how it was that the letter which lay behind this intrigue had been written by me. Raymond replied that it was quite by chance. The prosecutor retorted that chance already had a number of misdemeanours on its conscience in this affair. He wanted to know if it was by chance that I hadn't intervened when Raymond had beaten up his mistress, by chance that I'd acted as a witness at the police station, and also by chance that the statement I'd

made on that occasion had proved to be so thoroughly accommodating. (*The Outsider* 92).

A Chancer then emerges from a distinct literary genealogy; it combines various fictional strands in its articulation of existential issues. The narrative mode, the zero degree writing, never returns in quite this form. However the issues generated by its adoption are maintained in Kelman's subsequent novels.

Chapter Four

Temporality and the Origin of Negation: *The Busconductor Hines*

> The central problematic of all ontology is rooted in the phenomenon of time.
> **Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*.**[1]

> There are many varieties of experience of lack, or absence, and many subtle distinctions between the experience of negation and the negation of experience.
> **R D Laing, *The Politics of Experience*.**[2]

> Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being - like a worm.
> **Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.**[3]

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[1] *Being and Time*, p.464.
[2] R D Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, 1967 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.32.
[3] *Being and Nothingness*, p.21

Like all of Kelman's fictions, *The Busconductor Hines* is a text pervaded by that most pivotal existential problematic - freedom. Within the novel, this basic existential concern is imparted principally by a concentration upon two topics: negation and temporality; and it is with an analysis of these and how they contribute to the fundamental existential thematic with which this chapter shall be principally concerned. However as well as being Kelman's first published novel, *The Busconductor Hines* is additionally significant in that at a formal level it inaugurates the narrative mode utilised *mutatis mutandis* in all his subsequent novels. The technical devices - principally the ambiguous narrative voice - with which this novel is composed, induce the referents of the adjective 'Kelmanesque'. Therefore before proceeding to discuss the themes which the narrative articulates, it would be beneficial to analyse how the formal features of the text contribute to an existential construction of the work as a whole.

As with all of Kelman's prose fiction, *Hines* utilises a narrative focaliser, the eponymous busconductor of the title. However, focus is not achieved via a straightforward first-person narration, since throughout the text the narrative modulates between first and third-person voices. However, *Hines* maintains or implies an I-voice because when the third-person is used, it is deployed in such a way that it maintains a strict proximity to its ostensible subject. Thus for the reader, locating a clear deictic shift is problematic. Through this vacillating narrative style, the novel forces the reader into addressing a familiar Beckettian question: which I says I?

> it's written in the form of a sort of interior monologue [...] it's not written in the 'I' voice but it may as well have been written in the 'I' voice, so in that sense it has to have been written from the inside [...] There's a couple of things going on in the book [...] I can't really describe it as an interior monologue, nor is it a dialogue [...] It's very possible you see that Hines could be writing that novel. I mean that it is technically possible within the framework of the novel. Nothing that happens happens outwith the perception of Hines [...] I could describe it as a first person novel written in the third person.[4]

[4]Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed' , p.100, 101, 102.

As outlined here, Kelman's intended style has both a Chekhovian quality whereby the narrative voice is pressed down into, wrapped around, and dissolved into the character, but also a Joycean component where voices and registers interfuse.

> There ticks the clock; if it hadnt been wound then the ticking etc., it wouldnt be happening. And anyway, he had forgotten to bring the soap so this is a genuine reason not to wash [his feet]. Often it is the fresh socks that he forgets to bring and sometimes the towel and sometimes more than the one item maybe even the fucking lot so that Sandra, having to get whatever it is, for him. O christ. And he doesnt like having to ask her if he has forgotten, he gets so sick of it, this forgetting and the dependency. (*BH* 165)

The ambiguity of narrative voice to which Kelman alludes is evident in this passage. Speech (or thought?) - "O christ"- is conveyed as free representation unfettered by quotation marks. This obscures the shift from narrative voice to character voice, although as Kelman points out, given that it is "technically possible" that Hines narrates the tale, there may be no such shift at all. This ambiguity and equivocacy of voice is upheld by the third person passages which maintain a spoken quality by both importing demotic locutions ("the fucking lot") to maintain an informal tenor, and additionally by jettisoning apostrophes in the contractions "hadnt", "wouldnt", "doesnt". Although this latter move is not consistently maintained throughout the novel[5], the elision of the apostrophe turns the written into spoken: one cannot *hear* an apostrophe. Cairns Craig reads the combination of these and related techniques as a formal procedure set out to achieve a coherence which Hines, and Kelman's other 'heroes', lack.

> The text [...] constructs a linguistic unity which resists the fragmentation and isolation that the novels chart as the experience of their characters. Unity of voice replaces unity of political or social purpose as the foundation of solidarity: the text enacts at a linguistic level what it points to as absent in the world, a communality that transcends the absolute isolation of the individual human being.[6]

Whilst broadly accurate, this analysis requires does require some modification. Kelman's narrative strategy has a twofold motivation: to achieve an objectivity, a kind of epistemological degree zero such as the reader encounters in the work of

[5]For example: "It's no patience you need man it's skill." (*BH* 126)
[6]Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', p.103-4.

Robbe-Grillet, whilst still retaining an experiencing subject - a character to whom these experiences belong. Narrated situations and narrated events are situations and events for *someone*, albeit a fictional someone. Events and situations constitute 'facts' about that person. Thus the modulating narrative mode is deployed to efface any distance between the narrative, the narrator and the reader; it is to enforce the factical and reduce or preclude any possibility of distancing or any space to enable judgement. It does this by closing the gap between narrator and protagonist. Kelman tells us that he seeks to "write a story where there is no space between the telling and the event."[7] Therefore Craig's analysis, whilst correct in identifying linguistic solidarity as both an impetus and an effect of Kelman's prose style, errs by moving in the wrong direction. It mistakes the space wherein the solidarity is to be achieved, by moving from the concrete, the very specificity which Kelman's narrative is designed to maintain, to the linguistic: for Kelman though this separation is not possible since the linguistic is within the concrete, within the world. Manfred Malzahn commits a similar mistake when he writes that in *Hines*, the "main narrative technique is the transcendence of reality"[8], but what Kelman does, or what he intends, is precisely the opposite: he moves the narrator *into* the world of the character. The narrator occupies the same fictional space as the subject of the narrated events thereby rendering the linguistic coextensive with the concrete world: there is no 'transcendence', because there is no transcendent position. Consequently although the third-person voice predominates, it declines the omniscience associated with the traditional use of this mode; the reader only 'sees' what Hines sees. It is essential for an understanding of Kelman's work that these points are grasped. Simultaneously affirming Sartre's call for a "hard realism of subjectivity without mediation or distance"[9], it further helps account for Kelman's interest in the *nouveau roman*. The introduction of the modulating first person/ third

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[7]James Kelman in Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed', p.122.
[8]Manfred Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel' in ed. Cairns Craig, *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), IV, pp.229-242, p.239. Malzhan's error is perhaps explicable by his desire to accomodate Kelman within the parameters of what he terms 'Scottish working-class' fiction.
[9]Sartre quoted in Anna Bruschetti, 'Sartre and the Age of the American Novel', trans. Maria-Teresa Vanderboegh and David Vanderboegh in eds. Jean-François Fournay and Charles D Minahen, *Situating Sartre in Twentieth-Century Thought and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1997), pp.71-92, p.76.

person narrative style represents both a continuation and a surpassing of the compositional technique of *A Chancer*, assessed in chapter three. It is a continuation, because what underpins its use is still based upon the premises of the New Novel.

In an essay on Beckett, Robbe-Grillet invokes Heidegger to insist that it is the task of the writer to show what being-there consists in; for Robbe-Grillet "the essential theme" is "presence".[10] Kelman wants to do this in an 'objective' way; but it is objective in a specialised, qualified sense. Roland Barthes prefixes his study of Robbe-Grillet with a quotation from the *Oxford English Dictionary* pointing to a particular use of the noun 'objective': "In optics, the lens situated nearest the object to be observed."[11] Kelman when using the third person is committed to a proximity of contact, a precise contiguity. The narrative "lens" is situated within the world of the subject and like a lens it records without judging what it is recording. Lack of judgement is the important outcome. This is the notion of objectivity which Kelman discusses with Kirsty McNeill; one which is wholly committed to the enactment of "factual reality"[12]. It is a technique committed to concretion, the establishment of an objective facticity but also a specific concretion: the situations through which the novel moves are relative to a particular subjectivity. A straightforward third-person narrative can achieve the concrete but will necessarily downgrade the subject; a purely first-person account lacks the factual objectivity of the third-person. Kelman's existentialist aesthetic requires both: both being and world, subject and framework.

Facticity and concretion are established immediately the novel opens:

> Hines jumped up from the armchair, she was about to lift the huge soup-pot of boiling water. She nodded when he said, I'll get it.
> [...] What a weight, he said.
> I put in too much ... She had returned to the oven for a smaller pot

[10]Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'Samuel Beckett, or "Presence" in the Theatre', trans. Barbara Bray, in ed. Martin Esslin, *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp.108-116, p.108, p.114.
[11]Roland Barthes 'Objective Literature: Alain Robbe-Grillet', trans. Richard Howard in Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet: Jealousy and In The Labyrinth*, 1957, 1959, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp.11-25, p. 11.
[12]Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman', p.4. In this interview, Kelman names Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute and explicitly links the development of his own narrative techniques to contact with the *nouveau roman*.

> of water which was also boiling. She murmured, almost inaudibly. What?
> She glanced at him.
> Sorry; I thought you were eh ... He prised the lid off his tobacco tin and began rolling a cigarette. Before putting the empty pots back into their place in the kitchen-cabinet she wiped them dry with the dishtowel. Then she undressed. She stopped, and walked to draw the venetian blind at the window above the sink. Hines smiled. Passing helicopters eh! (*BH* 9)

This passage begins with the subject followed by an active verb; subject and verb suggesting the existential couplet of Being and doing. A number of sentences - "I put [...] She glanced [...] He prised [...] She stopped" - convey processes, the cumulative effect of which is to suggest and reinforce the notion of activity disclosed by the opening clause. The frequent use of the definite article provokes the situational specificity which one would expect from an existentialist text, and as with all of Kelman's novels, the opening is immediately determinative, the passage lacks any aetiological moments; there is no antecedent causal state. We do not know why Hines has jumped until we move further into the narrative. Similarly, Hines' wife is initially indicated by the pronoun "she" and only as the tale progresses do we learn her name. This is existentially significant as it drives the narrative forward and insists upon a future orientation; a facet of some importance as Kelman describes to Duncan McLean:

> The principle part of that sentence is the first one which is 'Hines jumps up' [sic]. There is no cause or effect: it's a picture of a fact; the fact is: somebody has jumped up. That begins the whole thing, the character jumps up, stands to attention - there is this movement going on. And then you start analysis [...] It's got to begin in a really unemphatic way [...] It's got to be something that's so everyday.[13]

Nothing could be more everyday than the taking of a bath. The avowed concern with the objective (in the sense outlined above) depiction of fact makes the novel 'existential' in a basic way: '*x* exists' is an existential proposition, a 'fact'. Kelman's novels and stories work to emphasise, to contend, that these basic moments, or analogous situations, exist and in so doing they designate an extra-textual reality. Given all the above, it is surprising that Douglas Gifford in an early review of the

[13]Duncan Maclean, 'James Kelman Interviewed', p.120.

novel writes that there is a "paradox that all this craft and detail is spent on apparently so slight a central situation."[14] But the relation of style to content in *The Busconductor Hines* is only paradoxical if one is not aware of existential philosophy and existential literature. Since Kelman's fictions share in Heidegger's concern with Dasein's average everydayness, elaborate conventions of plotting and traditional narrative sequentiality are outlawed; they have to be. Nothing happens, or rather nothing extraordinary happens. This however does not render "slight" the fictive situations which Hines moves through. Hines himself describes his situation as "demanding" but "not odd" (*BH* 87), pointing to the difficulties which inhere in the most seemingly innocuous situations. Kelman's literary project is therefore analogous with formal existentialism in that it seeks to reinvest the everyday with significance; to show that the lives of his characters even whilst embroiled in the diurnal are anything but "slight".

Beginning with the everyday, Heidegger's analysis of Dasein moves to consider what he terms 'existentials'[15], the basic features of Dasein's (and only Dasein's) being. For Heidegger one of the most fundamentally important existentials is Mood, something which Dasein "always has" (*BT* 173). To designate this existential, Heidegger uses the term *Stimmung*, which in German conveys simultaneously the tuning of a musical instrument. This idea of tuning is carried over into the notion of *Befindlichkeit*, roughly 'how one finds oneself', and Heidegger argues that one always finds oneself in a mood. These moods are ontologically important because they disclose, they 'light up' the world, exposing what one has been previously unaware of, but they also direct how Dasein, as a hermeneutical Being, engages with and understands the world. Although mentioning boredom and joy, Heidegger, following Kierkegaard, devotes considerable time to Angst. When augmented by boredom they represent perhaps the classic existential symptoms. Angst and boredom cling to, surround and constantly threaten to engulf Kelman's protagonists and Robert Hines is no exception. In *The Busconductor Hines*, these twin moods surface almost immediately:

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[14]Douglas Gifford, 'The Richest Collection in Years', *Books in Scotland*, 15 (Summer 1984), 9-14, (p.11).
[15]See *Being and Time*, p.70.

I dont know what's up with me sometimes (*BH* 19)

my state of utter boredom (*BH* 34)

The aporia present in the first quotation depicts the indefinite quality which divorces anxiety from basic fear. Fear is intentional, in the philosophical sense; anxiety is not. Heidegger tells us that "the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety" (*BT* 23); a formulation which Hines repeats: "There are parties whose attention to a variety of aspects of existence renders life uneasy. It cannot be said to be the fault of Hines that he is such a party. (*BH* 181). Angst and boredom function as symbols indicating an ontological malaise immediately recognisable from Heidegger in which "Being has become manifest as a burden." (*BT* 173) However the occurrence of these existentials is of less importance than what they reveal, and for Heidegger moods ultimately reveal two things: Dasein's temporal structure and the presence of 'the nothing'. These archetypal existential notions of temporality and nullity saturate Kelman's text. The former predominates, and given its centrality in the novel and in Heidegger's ontology, it is to temporality that I shall attend first.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the protagonist is a busconductor, numerous references to time and the temporal suffuse the novel. In the first of the two quotations above Hines' indication of anxiety follows an exchange with his wife. In bed, Sandra has forgotten to "check the clock": Hines replies "You're best no to." (*BH* 19). The novel however suggests that forgetting time is impossible. Hines, his wife and his son, live lives regulated by external, public or clock-time. Sandra wants to work full-time, Hines wants more overtime, Hines' paper of choice is the *Evening Times*, and ticking clocks appear like pedal points throughout the narrative. What the novel rapidly discloses is a disparity, a conflict, between existential time and clock-time or public time.

> He yawned. A bit early yet I suppose - the time; a bit early yet, to go to bed.
> She smiled.
> Naw, half-ten, too early. If you're really tired you should go.
> He nodded. (*BH* 29)

> Things passed sluggishly [...] The clock. He raised himself to see the time: apparently 20 minutes had elapsed since the alarm clock sounded. It seemed like twenty seconds. Too late now to make any breakfast. (*BH* 112)

The disjunction between the two temporalities is clearly seen here. Hines' body feels tired and so signals that it is 'time' for bed, but the clock dictates that it is not. Conversely when he should be making his way to work, his body-clock suggests that only a few seconds have expired, whereas the alarm clock registers a greater temporal movement. Both these quotations illustrate the disruption engendered by the orienting of life around the artificial time of the clock. What is a clock?

> A clock is a physical system in which an identical temporal sequence is constantly repeated, with the provision that this physical system is not subject to change through any external influence. The repetition is cyclical. Each period has an identical temporal duration. The clock provides an identical duration that constantly repeats itself [...] This time is thoroughly uniform, homogenous.[16]

The propensities of clock-temporality which Heidegger picks out expand within Kelman's novel. Clock temporality predominates and extends, creating what Hines deems a "clockwork universe" (*BH* 112). Initially this may seem a restating of the familiar Modernist *agon* between, to use Bergson's terms, *temps durée* and clock-time. Whilst similarities are present, it is important to recall that Heidegger is equally critical of both the Bergsonian and Aristotelian models of time. According to Heidegger both repeat the idea of time as a series of nows, a sempiternal sequence, and this construal contaminates Dasein producing a distracting movement away from authentic selfhood. "I'm sick of this eternal busconducting" (*BH* 39); Hines accordingly identifies his profession as one which produces such cylicality. In a characteristic addition, Kelman imports a socio-economic detail to his existentialism as the novel insists on a quasi-Marxian identification between a society structured according to a capitalist grid, which is necessarily temporal, and an impoverishment of primordial existential temporality: "The Department of Transport must bear much of

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[16] Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 1989, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.4E.

the blame, the way it fucks with one's body-clock." It "fucks with" the body clock because it represents and is structured by the mechanical clock.

> The clock shows us the now, but no clock ever shows the future or has ever shown the past. All measuring of time means bringing time into the 'how much'. If I determine by the clock the point at which a future event will occur, then it is not the future that is meant; rather what I determine is 'how long'. I now have to wait until the now intended. (*CT* 17E)

What Hines terms "garage time" (*BH* 186) is this sequence of nows. Garage time causes a collapsed past and a negated future; a sequestered, anchorless life, a "carry on backwards and forwards" (*BH* 91) and backwards and forwards constitutes no movement at all.

> Kelman's narratives are not concerned with progressions along a temporal trajectory of events; they are concerned with an unchangeable context into which human beings are thrown and from which there is no escape. They are concerned fundamentally, therefore, not with the progress implied by a narrative sequence but with repetition - repetition as the systematisation and dehumanisation to which working-class people, above all others, are subjected.[17]

Here Cairns Craig picks out repetition, systematisation and dehumanisation as being symptomatic of a curtailed temporality. If we bring out the existential issues involved then Hines has no 'trajectory' because he is encapsulated in the now, encapsulated in his role - whether busconductor, husband or father- and thus without that ecstatic future orientation which both Heidegger and Sartre insist occupies a central place in existential ontology. It is to underline this that the novel ends with Hines returning to the buses. The busconductor who endlessly describes and re-describes the same route, under the aegis of a never altering chronology of the clock both literally and metaphorically depicts human reality shorn of the dynamic temporality necessary for authentic being. For Hines "the immediate past is not only today but tomorrow" (*BH* 81) and this appraisal of a recapitulatory existence noticeably omits the temporal dimension to which Heidegger attributes the greatest importance. "The fundamental phenomenon of time is the future". (*Concept of Time* 14E) If one is lodged in a

[17]Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, p.105.

perpetual present, a network of nows, then one becomes static. For Heidegger, human being *is* temporality; if it lacks a temporal dimension then it lacks precisely those ontological qualities which make human being human being. Dasein made static becomes an object. It is this notion of Dasein becalmed in the now that transplants the novel, moving it outwith a Bergsonian paradigm and into an existential one. In so doing, the novel again suggests that the prevalent capitalist society generates an economic facticity inimical to Dasein's existentiality. Hines talks of "sold hours" (*BH* 206), signalling a commodification or in Heideggerian terms a transmutation of fluid time into quantifiable *zuhanden* or *vorhanden*. Hines therefore collocates his employers, public-temporality and objectification:

> Best to ignore fixed things like weeks and months and the rest of it. That's the time thing they set you up. (*BH* 70)
>
> The time things they set you up. (*BH* 81)
>
> Hines had explained how the thing was genuinely distanced from individuals as such. (*BH* 129)

Added calendar divisions both fix, in the sense of making immobile, and fix in the sense of datability and Hines tells us that his employers regard him as a "fixture". (*BH* 112) Further, the mysterious "thing" negates individuality because it takes world-time as temporally primordial: it negates or chronically restricts existential time and thus is culpable in an act of reification and ontological restriction. For Hines, the "time thing" is both an object itself but additionally the principle means of his own objectification. The time thing is the time of 'the they', like 'the thing' it is both distant from and distancing to, existential individuality. Heidegger writes that

> [i]n utilising public means of transport [...] every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconscpicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the "they" is unfolded. (*BT* 164)

The dictatorship of the they is the dictatorship of the garage for Hines not only utilises public transport, but as a conductor, he assists in its regulation. Instead then of an

authentic subjectivity, with its corresponding futural horizon, Hines is converted into a function.

> Travelling on the Underground, I often wonder with a kind of dread what can be the inward reality of the life of this or that man employed on the railway - the man who opens the doors, for instance, or the one who punches the tickets. Surely everything both within him and outside him conspires to identify this man with his functions [...]. The rather horrible expression 'time table' perfectly describes his life. So many hours for each function. Sleep too is a function so that the other functions may be exercised in their turn [...]. We need go no further; this sketch is sufficient to suggest the emergence of a kind of vital schedule; the details will vary with the country, the climate, the profession, etc., but what matters is that there is a schedule.[18]

Substitute buses for references to the Underground, and Marcel's depiction of the employee condemned to clock-servitude lights up the *lebenswelt* of Hines; one in which everything is settled "from the hour of birth", where "the A going to B that the C has become a picture" (*BH* 119). Kelman's choice of employment for his character is not therefore either accidental nor of merely contingent importance. As a busconductor, Hines begins and ends his working day at a terminus, a structure which shares its name with the Roman god of boundaries. The terminus binds because it represents the source of clock temporality, it provides Hines with both his *terminus ad quem* and his *terminus ad quo* and thereby the means of ontological constriction. So for Hines, "the problem is the surrounding" (*BH* 98), but the problematic instantiated by the bus company, it is one form of "surrounding", expands to include his total world. Glasgow is experienced as a "narrowing" (*BH* 145) suggesting what Heidegger describes as existentiality being "determined by facticity". (*BT* 236) What the novel does is to depict increased and increasing factical obstacles such that the zone of the possible suffers a corresponding contraction. The radical alterity that Heidegger and Sartre position at the heart of Dasein, or the *pour-soi*, has no external outlet precisely because the external world, or more properly the factical, is composed such that there are no alternatives. The coefficient of adversity is multiplied, has

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[18]Gabriel Marcel, 'On the Ontological Mystery', 1954, trans. Manya Harari, *The Philosophy of Existence* (London: Harvill,1954)

become so great, that Hines is "forced into situations a dog wouldnt be forced into." (*BH* 182).

Bound, restricted, arrested, "Hines Robert whose number is 4729" (*BH* 167) becomes an avatar of Joseph K. (K.'s last words in *The Trial* are "Like a dog") and the Kafkaesque symmetry is reinforced in one of the two[19] explicit literary references in the novel: "One fine morning Hines R. was arrested". Like Joseph K., Hines is arrested both from without - The Department of Transport and the 'imperial' world with which Hines takes it to be complicit - but also from within. Converging with Marcel's idea of "the actor" who is "reduced to living as though he were in fact submerged by his functions"[20], Sartre probes the society which demands that man "limit himself to his function" (*BN* 59). When this dual process of submersion and limitation is internalised, it transports into Bad Faith. "Here you have a Busconductor Hines" (*BH* 97) who wants to become a "the Busdriver Hines" [sic] (*BH* 64), but both are roles, both are mistakenly taken to provide a pre-structured, already-defined self. Famously, Sartre illustrates this concept by describing a café waiter who internalises his role such that the nothingness of the *pour-soi* is displaced, one might say filled, by an imagined essential structure or nature. It is imagined because as Sartre argues bad faith disregards, or attempts to efface, the pivotal ontological distinction between an inanimate object and a human being: "the waiter in the café can not be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell is an inkwell, or the glass is a glass." (*BN* 59) He cannot be in the way that a glass may be said to be, because human being is "essentially ahead of itself" (*BT* 458).

Thus curtailed, Hines complains of "absent horizons" (*BH* 168) but he is simultaneously aware that "one is occasionally required to consider the future" (*BH* 43). The problem is however that in the society which he inhabits, the future, when assessed in terms of live possibilities is so restricted as to constitute no future at all. "1-man-buses are the vehicular items of the not too distant future" (*BH*

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[19]The other being to Kirilov (*BH* 136), the idealist who commits suicide in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Kirilov appears frequently in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*.

[20]Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence*, p.3.

80). One man buses render conductors obsolete, but one cannot go backwards either since "life on the broo had not been good" (BH 83). An impossible past and an impossible future mean Hines cannot "be getting beyond the moment" (*BH* 119). He scans the *Evening Times* situations vacant column and comes up with nothing for there is no vacant situation for Hines to project himself into.

> there he is and they are here, the unit, the trio. And it is all so fucking long, so long, and yet here he is, still fucking here and not doing, not doing anything, still here, on the buses, back on the third term. And if the connection is now to be severed there can be no return. (*BH* 82-3)

Hines is faced, as Patrick Doyle will be, with Kierkegaard's Either/Or. What Kierkegaard intends by this locution is sometimes misunderstood: Kierkegaard is not contending that one should choose between X and Y; the either/or is whether one chooses choice: So "give us an aye or give us a naw - because in betweens no longer exist in any scheme of the world" (*BH* 99) The introduction of Kierkegaard re-orientates how the reader encounters and interprets the following passage.

> The position in which he is to be finding himself is no worse than that of countless others whose efforts are no longer negotiable but that that position might yet have become tranquil that they could have multiplied inasmuch, inasmuch as Hines could eventually, he could have become
> He was wanting that becoming. (*BH* 98)

First we should notice that Hines expands his prognosis to include "countless others" like himself, the universal in the particular, but the key term here is 'becoming'. A notable component of Hegelianism, where becoming is a synthesis of Being and Nothing, in Kierkegaard the term is adopted to express the mode of being constitutive of authentic personhood.[21] Subjective existence existentially speaking is a process of becoming. The omission of the closing full stop after 'becoming' helps depict a future not yet decided, a blank space. What a person is to become is his or her own responsibility. "If [...] the self does not become itself then it is in despair, whether it

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[21]"the subject is existing, and that existing is a becoming"; "to be in mediation is to be finished; to exist is to become." Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p.196, 199.

knows it or not. Yet a self, every moment it exists, is in a process of becoming".[22] This is the becoming that Hines wants. Yet as Kierkegaard maintains, a discrepancy arises between what is desired and what is achievable - possibility is not limitless - and the realisation of this leads us back to Angst or despair. Therefore the novel has a circular structure. Kierkegaard tells of the "decisive moment", when man is brought "to the utmost extremity, where in human terms there is no possibility" (*SD* 68). For Kierkegaard this vacuum is filled by faith, but Hines, like Patrick Doyle and Sammy Samuels is a self-professed atheist. "It's alright for you christians but what about the rest of us man? no after-life or fuck all." (*BH* 48). No 'after-life' merely repeats and exacerbates the lack of possibility in this life: "A good genuine atheist's got no fucking chance in this grey but gold bundle of shite of a fucking city." (*BH* 40) Syntactic disarray and repeated clauses produce a paradoxical narrative which moves forward, through the hours of the clock, and yet stays still since clock time is a sequence of repetition.

> The backsliding shite [...] You can have a way of moving which you reckon has to be ahead in a definite sense and then for some reason, for some reason what happens is fuck all really, nothing, nothing at all, nothing at all is happening yet there you are (*BH* 91).

Heidegger argues however that even when Dasein is taken with 'the they' he or she still maintains a dim acquaintance with existential time. During a walk in the park, Hines stops to contemplate the river: "the driftwood flowing towards him, passing below; he went to the other side to watch it reappear." (*BH* 54). It is the flow which is significant, for it suggests the constancy of movement, the always becoming of existential identity, but the implication is that Hines identifies himself with the driftwood. He does not or cannot act and thereby plunge into the future and thus is merely transported along a series of unaltering nows. Shortly thereafter he encounters a woman who resembles Sandra, pushing a pram as Sandra once did. The pram, which throughout the novel is associated with Hines' son Paul, functions as a pointer to the future, - Paul is described as "another tomorrow" (*BH* 119) - as Sandra, whom Hines remembers meeting from work, becomes an indicator of the past. Again

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[22]Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 1849, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.60.

though, in some of the most moving passages of the novel, Hines transfers his hopes to his son. Paul is the nearest Hines can come to a future.

Although Hines construes himself as "always beat" (*BH* 22) he both effects and displays little resistances. His uniform makes him feel "itchy", he feels good when he is without it and he refuses to "play a part in the system of the British Greats" (*BH* 109). The uniform is a symbol of public-time; it represents the world of his employers which is why Hines declines to wear it when he is sent to head office on his day off. So the 'greenly' uniform represents time made uniform and Hines' poor timekeeping is perhaps the most readily detectable evidence that he has yet to completely surrender to the inauthenticity which haunts the novel. This tardiness is supplemented by an activity which seems so commonplace that one barely notices its occurrence. Hines smokes.

Smoking is an activity which recurs throughout Kelman's prose. Its importance here is flagged by the Polygon edition of *The Busconductor Hines* which has a dustjacket which replicates the design of a packet of Rizla cigarette papers. Smoking is important for it involves itself with and continues the theme of time. Smoking and time are inseperable. In his *Cigarettes are Sublime*, Richard Klein describes how the photographer Brassaï employed cigarettes to measure the exposure time of photographic plates, and how Sartre constantly exemplifies philosophical points using cigarettes as concrete examples.[23] Similarly, Michael Inwood in his study of Heidegger details how Greek peasants (his term) describe the duration of a journey not in hours or minutes, but by the number of cigarettes consumed in its undertaking.[24] What these examples show, and what Klein goes on to discuss, is the importance of the cigarette as a temporal measure or rather an *alternative* temporal

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[23] Richard Klein, *Cigarettes are Sublime* (1993, rpt. London: Picador, 1995), p.24. Sartre explicitly links smoking and time in an interview with Simone de Beauvoir. "To smoke a pipe you have to be settled in a specific place, at a café table for instance, and then you have to stare at the world around you as you smoke. A Pipe is an immobilizing element." Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, p.412. As Klein points out, Sartre never smokes nor mentions cigars: "wrong class". (*Cigarettes are Sublime* 28)

[24] Michael Inwood, *Heidegger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.30.

measure. Klein argues that the cigarette is not a cigarette "but a clock" (ibid.) - not however the standardised clock of public-time.

> The cigarette kills time, chronometric time, the stark mechanical measure of mortality [...] Smoking cigarettes is permanently linked to the idea of suspending the passage of ordinary time and instituting some other. (8)

> The moment of taking a cigarette allows one to open a parenthesis in the time of ordinary experience, a space and time of heightened attention that gives rise to a feeling of transcendence [...] It produces a little rush of infinity that alters perspectives, however slightly, and permits, albeit briefly, an ecstatic standing outside of oneself. (16)

Transposing this back to Kelman's novel allows us to recast Hines frequent cigarette breaks as his means of removing himself from chronometric time, a way of having his own time, a way of killing clock-time. At various significant moments in the novel, Hines reaches for his tobacco tin. Chided by the Deskclerk over his lack of punctuality Hines rolls a cigarette. A discussion with Sandra who wants to work full-time ends with Hines reaching for his tobacco tin to elude further participation in the conversation. Having drawn a Sunday shift, Hines spends some time at home before proceeding to the terminus:

> he sipped at the tea. It was lukewarm; he set the cup onto the mantelpiece and rolled a cigarette. He glanced at the clock. Well ... I suppose I suppose. He looked to Sandra but she didnt acknowledge him. He lit the cigarette. (*BH* 43)

Here smoking takes Hines from the relentlessness of the ticking clock. It takes back, if only to the smallest degree, minutes due to the public-time of the Department of Transport. Therefore it is one of the novel's most significant moments when Hines interrupts his route, stops the bus, and goes to buy tobacco.

Cigarettes by their nature are short-lived and they cost money. Hines describes how he removes funds from the limited housekeeping budget to buy tobacco. Cigarettes enable a brief supplanting of working time but to feed the habit Hines requires more money and in the world he inhabits, money and time are inseparable. Therefore

whatever respite cigarettes offer is only temporary besides, "THE MORE YOU SMOKE THE MORE YOU RISK YOUR HEALTH". (*BH* 73)

Hines' engagement with the world is unsatisfactory, frustrating, and this triggers an introspection, an internal migration. In so doing, *The Busconductor Hines* suggests a literary ancestry, positioning itself alongside *Notes from Underground* and much of Beckett's early and middle prose. Comparisons with the latter seem especially rewarding. The anonymous blurb on the Everyman edition describes Hines as possessing a "gloriously anarchic imagination in the manner of Leopold Bloom." Gloriously anarchic it may be but it is less in the manner of Leopold Bloom than in the manner of Beckett's Murphy. Both Hines and Murphy inhabit condemned buildings. The hero of one eponymous text shares with the hero of another an aversion to clock-time - Murphy speaks of time as "the old fornicator" and of "the bewitching Miss Greenwich"[25]- but additionally both protagonists attempt to achieve relative refuge through an interior movement, a withdrawal. Murphy's retreat from the world, form what the character Neary describes as the "big blooming buzzing confusion" (*Murphy* 6) is paralleled by Hines who when alone, closes the curtains and sets a record on continuous play, or lies with his eyes closed and his fingers in his ears. Imagination or disengagement constitutes and creates a zone of freedom that seems wholly absent in the world without. Both novels suggest that even a limited freedom is only possible *in intellectu*. Various critics have pointed out Beckett's fondness for the work of the Belgian Occasionalist philosopher Arnold Geulincx, a thinker whom Beckett explicitly names in his work. The Beckett scholar Ruby Cohn identifies an important passage in Geulincx's *Ethics* which furnishes Beckett with a favourite metaphor: "While the ship headed towards the West speedily drags the passenger away, nothing prevents him from walking towards the East on that very ship."[26] This, Geulincx's idea of the limitations affecting human freedom, is adopted by Molloy in a slightly modified from:

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[25]Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, 1938 (London: Picador, 1973), p.67.
[26]Ruby Cohn, 'Philosophical Fragments in the Work of Samuel Beckett' in ed. Martin Esslin, *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp.169-177, p.171-2.

> I who loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who was not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wake.[27]

Hines too is an "object aboard the world" (*BH* 86) but his world is not the deck of a boat, it is the deck of a bus. Back to the bus and back to the buses. Both boat and bus suggest facticity, the world from which it is impossible to alight.

If angst generates an encounter with issues of existential temporality then it also engenders an encounter with the nothing. Negation and nothingness are significant features of both *The Busconductor Hines* and formal, philosophical existentialism. Throughout Kelman's novel there are continuous references to negation, absence and lacunae. These thematic incidences are dealt with below, but negation arises too at a formal level and our discussion of Beckett prepares the way for this. In a passage which could function as a description of a common narrative style, Celia, Murphy's girlfriend, describes Murphy's mode of oration:

> She felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. (*Murphy* 27)

Form spills into content as manner of narration suggests mode of being. The experience of nothing or nothingness, ruptures the intelligible safe structures which maintain and ground the self. Language, as a means of grasping, knowing and making certain, becomes problematised, crepitant. Negation and related concepts arise in the novel at a syntactic level as Kelman repeats the familiar Beckettian move of self-cancelling sentences.

> Although I'm sorry I'm no really sorry. And I dont mean that I dont mean it cause I do, I do mean it. I apologise and do not apologise (*BH* 61)

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[27]Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, 1950-1952, (London: Picador, 1979), p.48.

> The present situation may well be demanding but the circumstances are not odd. They are baffling. They are baffling and they are not fucking baffling. (*BH* 87)
>
> At first sight the position he is in is of an appalling nature. It is not appalling. (*BH* 103)

Here language unworks itself as its epistemological status as a hook upon the real becomes threatened. Hines' assertions have no epistemological value: they state and un-state. They say nothing in a moment of Beckettian "obliteration". These textual moments are related to and explicable by two principal existential conceptions of nothing. For Sartre, as discussed in the previous chapter, reality is punctured by *negatités* (*BN* 21); human being itself is a lack, a nothing, which causes nothingnesses to arise in the world. Nothing constitutes freedom because freedom is a *no*thing rather than a *some*thing. In *Being and Time* and 'What is Metaphysics?', Heidegger takes the nothing to be revelatory of the radical contingency of all that is, but by so doing, it also serves to frame the something, the existent is that which stands out from the nothing. Both the Heideggerian and Sartrean conceptions are present within the text.

Hines describes the "District of D." as a place where "vacancies readily occur" (*BH* 94). Within this vacancy, he, Sandra and Paul live in a "no-bedroomed flat" (*BH* 96). Nothing expands to include Hines himself: his head is a "gap-site", a "delicate absence" (*BH* 160), but a description of the square he inhabits leads to a crucial and revealing rumination. The passage begins with Hines pondering the difficulties of animals in the city:

> They're starving right enough. And they are not to be having anywhere to live. They keep trying to stay one jump ahead of the demolition men. You get the building knocked down and then the equipment gets transferred around the corner, and so on down the line, getting nearer and nearer to this very window. And all the time the poor auld fucking animals go running for cover, scrambling along beneath the floorboards and up and down the stair they go (*BH* 80)

Hines as we have seen alludes to Kafka in describing his situation as being one which a dog would not be forced into. If we retain this then the implication of the passage above is that the animals and the occupants of the tower blocks are equivalent, they

share a certain 'unhomeliness'. Always on the move, they have no permanent shelter. As Hines puts it he, and by extension they, are "not in a state of harbour" (*BH* 104). For Heidegger, this feeling of *unheimlichkeit* is symptomatic of, and denotes the presence of, Angst. Heidegger tells us that "in anxiety one feels uncanny [*unheimlich*]" (*BT* 233) and that "anxiety is anxious in the face of the "nothing" of the world." (*BT* 343) The passage from *Hines* then reveals the kind of nothing of which Heidegger speaks. The collapsing buildings which seem to be coming at Hines as if they are toppling dominoes, sit beside his earlier realisation of contingency (*BH* 99). The impermanence of the buildings forces the realisation that nothing is as it has to be. Nothing that Hines sees is permanent - "the whole world's crumbling about my ears" (*BH* 61) - and this includes Hines himself. Hines' flat is "to be being demolished" (*BH* 81) an ambiguous assertion for it resonates on two levels. Firstly it straightforwardly points to the tearing down of old buildings but secondly it throws up this notion of transient being: the demolished flat entails a "flit out from here to the next place" but it registers also the unveiling achieved through the experience of angst. Being, when read in terms of commonplace certainty, is being demolished. Nothing assaults the familiar, "everyday familiarity collapses" (*BT* 233) and through this it exposes the contingency at the heart of being.

> We "hover" in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves - we humans who are in being - in the midst of things slip away from ourselves [...] In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is there.[28]

This experience of lost totality or wholeness irrupts when Hines plays music: "the sounds didnt connect [...] The lines had snapped. Lines extend from sound to point. When the points are absent the connection has become a shambles" (*BH* 101) The connectiveless world, nothing connects with nothing, although it arises through anxiety has a positive aspect. As Heidegger explains "without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom." ('What is Metaphysics?'103).

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[28]Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', trans. anon in ed. David Farrell Krell, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, rev. edn. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.93-110,p.101.

Nothingness holds freedom out as a possibility but it needs to be grasped. Here the Heideggerian interpretation is supplemented by the Sartrean one: "when all is said and done he is a negation. Being a negation is peculiar. Hines can see himself as this and it makes him think." (*BH* 202) What is interesting here is the ambiguity inherent in the passage. Is Hines a negation, in the non-existential sense; is he superfluous a nothing, a nobody. Or, is this Hines' eventual realisation of his constitution as a Sartrean *pour-soi*? If the latter, then Hines is guilty of Bad Faith. He is correct to point out that "being a negation is peculiar", for each individual on a Sartrean model is a peculiar negation and this tallies with Heidegger's contention that anxiety and the nothing "individualises Dasein" (*BT* 233), but Hines seeks refuse in the trio, the family, the unit. Resolute, or authentic Dasein, is required to face the world as an individual. To achieve authenticity, Dasein has to accept "the uncanniness [*unheimlichkeit*] of thrown individualisation" (*BT* 325). As Heidegger points out, Anxiety, arising from the nothing, should bring Dasein "face to face with its Being-free-for". (*BT* 232) Hines however can only achieve half of this process.

> Now: towards the latter stages of his last spell on the broo a certain husband and father's marked aversion to nought led him into what can authentically be called a pragmatic assessment of life, the outcome of which is his renewed determination to become a the [sic] Busdriver Hines. (*BH* 93-4)

The Nothing seen here as the "nought", has caused Hines to reassess his life, but instead of bringing him to the cusp of authenticity, he lapses. Nothing poses a question and Hines provides the wrong answer. He wants to be a "the Busdriver Hines". Authenticity however demands not a return to, but a struggle against an original condition. This takes us back to the issues arising through our discussion of temporality above. The novel suggests that Hines' position is the only possibility available. It is a tenuous, uncertain life. In a world shorn of certainties, "Maybe'll do" (*BH* 223).

Summarising, we may say that as in *A Chancer*, Kelman writes a non-sequential, episodic prose. It is a narrative punctuated by gaps and absence and these gaps correspond to the fragile ontology of Hines. A precarious and troubled existence,

Hines 'hovers', to use the Heideggerian term, in a perpetual anxiety. Whilst for Nietzsche, repetition and the eternal recurrence of the same represent a metaphorical 'test' for the overman, in *The Busconductor Hines*, they represent the daily reality for the occupants of a de-industrialised, collapsed society. Hines' life has no point. This purposelessness is at once the source of his freedom and also his problem in that it brings forth anxiety. For Hines, possibilities all belong to the past, symbolised by a never attempted emigration to Australia. The novel closes with Hines' unexplained return to the buses, but the last lines are the most revealing: "Hines shifted his position, he wiped the condensation from the back window and looked out." (*BH* 237). Significantly it is the back window Hines looks through. Hines can only ever see what lies behind. His return to his problematic occupation means he has not shifted position at all.

Kelman writes that in constructing *Hines*, he withdrew a number of literary references from the final text, in his next novel, *A Disaffection*, these references are brought to the fore.

Chapter Five

A Disaffection: Absurdity and Revolt

He feels imprisoned on this earth, he feels confined; the melancholy, the impotence, the sicknesses, the wild delusions of the captive break out in him; no consolation can console him for the very reason that it *is* mere consolation, gentle, head-splitting consolation in the face of the brutal fact of imprisonment. But if he is asked what he actually wants he cannot reply, for - this is one of his strongest arguments - he has no conception of freedom.
Franz Kafka, *Aphorisms*.[1]

They imagine that the sounds they receive flow into them, sweet and nourishing, and that their sufferings become music, like those of young Werther; they think that beauty is compassionate towards them. The mugs.
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*.[2]

It's the hysterical individual who allows his life to be polarised by simple extreme antitheses like strength-weakness, potency-impotence, health-sickness. He feels challenged but unable to struggle with social injustice, too weak, so he struggles with women, with children, with his 'unhappiness'.
Saul Bellow, *Herzog*.[3]

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[1]Franz Kafka, *Aphorisms*, p.35.
[2]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, p.246.
[3]Saul Bellow, *Herzog*, 1964 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.215.

Kelman's 1989 novel, *A Disaffection*, continues and refines the tradition of existentialist fiction. The novel focuses upon the alienation of Patrick Doyle and in so doing, pursues and represents in fictional form, the philosophies of, principally, Camus and Kierkegaard. Although these philosophers dominate, the inclusion of references to the Pythagoreans, Hegel and Schopenhauer are also, as we shall see, significant for an existential reading of the novel. The calmly declarative opening - "Patrick Doyle was a teacher. Gradually he had become sickened by it" (*D*1) - in its compression of 'plot' into two sentences, recalls Kafka, but simultaneously introduces part of the novel's philosophical content: absurdity.

> It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm - this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins' - this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. (*MS* 19)

A Disaffection begins in the past, Doyle "was" a schoolteacher, leaving the reader to wonder what Doyle is *now*. Another of Kelman's solitary males, a self-confessed "lonely man" (*D*16), and like the narrator of *Notes from Underground*, a 'sick' man, the novel opens with Doyle having already raised his 'why'. In reducing Patrick's past to two sentences delivered in the third person, the narrative then contends with the Doyle of the present. This lack of build-up, typical of the existentialist novel, suggests further that in this novel Kelman, like Camus, is not so much interested in the *discovery* of the absurd - we are not told how or why Doyle's 'sickness' has arisen - as in the *consequences*: "If one is assured of these facts, what is one to conclude, how far is one to go to elude nothing? Is one to die voluntarily or to hope in spite of everything?" (*M* 22). Absurdity, the possibilities of elusion and suicide, are the questions which the novel goes on to explore.

Absurdity itself is a polysematic term. It is firstly a rejection of, or realisation of, the absence of any transcendent[4]. Man is alone in the universe: "To be alone and without gods is death says Hölderlin but Hölderlin was wrong and is a poor bastard" (*D* 205). Hölderlin is "wrong", because to be alone and "without gods" is precisely man's life in an absurd universe:

> in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (*M* 13)

Absurdity includes an awareness or realisation of the lack of any extra-human 'truth' which would legitimise or explain human activity.

> No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable *a priori* in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition. (*M* 21)
>
> That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, these categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh. (*M* 26)

There are no logical, theological, or ethical premises which might uphold the individual and provide his life with 'meaning'. Camus inherits from Nietzsche a distrust of any rational or religious system that attempts to ground man or slot him into a pre-packaged significatory system. It is this post-Nietzschean, absurdist universe in which Patrick finds himself: "So God is dead is he, well, well, well." (*D* 80) Doyle's rehearsal of Nietzsche delineates the world and the universe into which he has been thrown; one in which he is alone, a Camusian 'stranger'. This experience of separation, Camus' "divorce" between the individual and the world which the individual inhabits, induces a profound alienation, productive of an emotional response which Heidegger characterises as the "not-at-home" (*BT* 234). Doyle's unhomeliness is evident throughout the novel. In describing Glasgow as "a form of antichthon" (*D* 205), the Pythagorean term for a second earth on the other side of the

[4] I should point out that Camus utilises this term in a way entirely different from Sartre. For Sartre transcendence is a structure of human being and describes the process whereby the *pour-soi* projects itself toward what it is not. Camus employs the term in the more familiar way to describe a going beyond this world.

sun, Doyle suggests that he experiences the city as unreal, unworldly. Break this noun apart and we find the root *chthon*, 'soil' and anti which as well as 'opposite' can also mean 'against'. But, if the city he inhabits is one in which he feels unsettled, then his alienation is compounded when he is alone in his house. Patrick's unease in the very place he is supposed to feel most 'at home', is one of the novel's most potent representations of solitary existential anxiety: "one of the problems of being alone, always coming into nothing, coming home to this coldness, a permanent dearth of warmth" (*D* 5); "The house is not a place to be. Get out of it." (*D* 89).

These quotations hint at another facet of absurdity. If awareness of the absurd unveils a 'gap' between man and his world, it can also engender a feeling of alienation from oneself.

> Pat shivered. He was standing in the bathroom staring at his face, having just tapped himself on the chin for some unfathomable reason - the moment when a person sees his or herself in a mirror, seeing a stranger, and peering at this stranger with furrowed brow. (*D* 124)
>
> this fucking I. I I I. I got really fucking sick of it I mean it was depressing, horrible. (*D* 145)
>
> He was looking at a bloke who had difficulty in seeing himself. (*D* 164)

The mirror is symbolically charged in that it re-presents the self as an other. Reflection undermines the sense of self. For Camus, "the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter [...] is also the absurd." (*M* 21) Such feelings of self-estrangement promote a need to "[e]scape from the head"(*D* 91), and Doyle's initial method of self-circumvention is to immerse himself in the crowd. He goes for drinks to the local art centre, goes to his parents, or his brother's house hoping to become absorbed in company, but such ventures are unsatisfactory. Patrick feels that he is "beginning to look forward to them far too much", that they are "a symptom of his lifestyle, viz the lonely man." (*D* 16).

Movement into the public or social sphere as a method of flight from the unhomely is characterised by Heidegger as 'falling':

> When in falling we flee *into* the "at-home" of publicness, we flee *in the face* of the "not-at-home"; that is, we flee in the face of the uncanniness which lies in Dasein - in Dasein as thrown Being-in-the-world [...](*BT* 234)

Like the narrator of 'Not not while the giro', Doyle requires company as either a palliative or a distraction, a mechanism of escape. Company promises communication but Doyle is in the position described in Beckett's *The Unnameable*: "the inability to speak, the inability to be silent, and solitude"[5] Doyle's aphasia, his inability to communicate effectively and thereby ease his solipsism, is disclosed in his meeting with his parents and throughout in his involvement with Alison. At dinner the Doyles sit "craned over the plates, the three people eating, this man and woman and man, while within the limits of each an intense caterwaul. We are alone! We are isolate beings! The good Lord alone" (*D* 114). His isolation and communicative incapacity is underlined when his father looks at him, the possibility of extended contact causing them both to look away. The simple familial act of drying the dishes finds Doyle "[n]ot having anything to talk about". He continues "[w]hat was there to talk about? Nothing. Fuck all." (*D* 118) The afternoon drinking session at Gavin's presents a situation from which Patrick "felt excluded immediately." (*D* 253). Contact with Alison is equally problematic. A car journey finds them both ill at ease; Doyle cannot even formulate what he wants to say, "even getting it into language is difficult." (*D* 132) A later meeting in Miller's Bar and Patrick "could not speak" (*D* 229); when Alison speaks, Patrick "missed what it was [...] he couldn't make out what it was [...] he missed it." (*D* 231). "This is a fellow needing human intercourse" (*D* 251) is Doyle's self-diagnosis but his assumption that company will provide amelioration is perpetually undone. An existential view would condemn even the attempt. Both Heidegger and Sartre construe the desire for dissolution within the social as being indicative of inauthenticity or bad faith. Sartre's notebooks describe an individual who

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[5]Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnameable*, p.365.

> deliberately loses himself [...] dissolves himself in the social. Like Heidegger's inauthentic being, which says 'One dies in order to avoid saying 'I die'. He relates to himself only through society.[6]

Thus in the passage above when Patrick refers to himself in the third person, the narrative form directly reflects his attempt to dissolve the 'I'. Throughout *A Disaffection*, the narrative voice modulates between the first and third person in order to enact at a formal level the existential indeterminacy of the speaker. The societal 'we' only provides an illusory shelter because an individual cannot divest himself of himself. Existential fiction and existential philosophy, tend to suggest therefore that an external salve for an individual's ontological distress is not possible. For Kierkegaard, "I can abstract myself from everything but not from myself", a point which Sartre has Roquentin declare in *Nausea*: "I cannot escape from myself."[7]

Since the public, external world provides little in the way of effective respite, Doyle is forced inward and so begins his "inability to be silent". If he cannot successfully communicate with others then he is left to talk with himself. His tacit soliloquies become therefore a "method of eradicating it all." (*D* 121). Concentrated introspection becomes another attempt to mitigate or expunge the angst which his solitary condition provokes; but in having to "force everything onto himself" (*D* 159), Doyle only increases his alienation. For Heidegger

> this alienation drives [Dasein] into a kind of Being which borders on the most exaggerated 'self-dissection', tempting itself with all possibilities of explanation [...] This alienation *closes off* from Dasein its authenticity and possibility [...] The alienation of falling - at once tempting and tranquillizing - leads by its own movement, to Dasein's getting *entangled* in itself. (*BT* 222-223)

Doyle's 'entanglement' is disclosed through his confused syntax ("the world was become bleak" (*D* 175); "not to think and not to spoke" (*D* 162), his constant detours of thought, and the parataxes and aposiopeses which disrupt both his internal and external speech patterns. Possibilities are conjured and effaced - "You can do it; come on. No. Yes. No. Aye ya fucking bastard ye come on" (*D* 251) - as the narrative,

[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War November 1939 - March 1940*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1985), p.13.
[7] Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, p.51. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, p.53.

borrowed from Beckett, encloses itself, doubles back upon itself, and envelops Doyle. The text makes sustained use of the "three dots" technique, prevalent in the work of Céline[8]. Whilst *A Disaffection*, *Death on Credit* and *Journey to the End of the Night* share an aesthetic committed to linguistic authenticity, Kelman's use of parentheses to disrupt narrative flow suggests further a world wholly lacking in necessary connections. In so doing, *A Disaffection* is a fictional replication of the process described by Camus where "thinking ceases to be unifying" (*M* 30).

Kelman's deployment of language conveys another existential point. Switching linguistic registers permits an accentuation of rootlessness.

> The man with the mournful face was looking at Pat. He was actually looking at him. It was funny. No it wasnt. But just as well paranoia was not a problem. No doubt he was an emissary from the education department of Scotland, sent to keep an eye on the chap Doyle who fails to turn up for headmagisterial appointments on top of everything else, these ghastly rumours, the chap's political beliefs, it seems he's agin the government. How awful. How absolutely fucking awful and incendiary. Dont tell us the bounder dislikes being a teacher! Dashed uncivil! And he has the dem cheek to stand up in front of children! (*D* 102)

Like the identity of the existential subject, the language is fluid, it refuses to settle. In the passage above, we move through literary locutions, "mournful face", antiquated formal terms, "chap", "bounder", parodied received pronunciation, "dem", to the 'taboo' - "fucking". Such use of register points to a Joycean component in Kelman's work. In *Ulysses*, and in particular the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode, a compendium of styles ensures that a pure, originatory language is never achieved. For Sartre, language is primarily a means of being-with-others. Within the text, the disruption of linguistic structure formalises the communicative inability of the subject. A familiar technique of existentialist fiction, syntactic chaos establishes at a technical level the ontological disarray of the narrator. Language becomes problematic as it reflects the discord of the speaker.

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[8] The term is Céline's. See his interview in ed. George Plimpton, *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, third series, 1967 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 83-102, p.96.

A language so problematicised finds Patrick exhibiting a familiar Beckettian trait. He craves silence, rest, "a pleasant soporicity" (*D* 66) and therefore a kind of closure, but he cannot cease from his Heideggerian "self-dissection": "All I seem to do is talk." (*D* 321). Silence is both an object of desire and an object of repulsion: desired because it would allow him rest, the "type of thing he never achieves" (ibid.); repulsive because in the silence he is left to himself. The need to fill the silence is a way of deflecting attention from the nothingness, in the Heideggerian sense, which surrounds him. As in *Happy Days*, encroaching silence is met with a barrage of literary and philosophical quotation and allusion: "Are there any quotations to help? What can be said if not done to alleviate matters" (*D* 183). For Patrick "it was these wee yarns he told himself that kept him fucking sane" (*D* 49). He shares Winnie's problem - "if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear."[9] The means of ostensible salvation is however the means of imprisonment. Language is both poison and cure and so Doyle remains immured in Beckett's famous paradox: "there is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."[10]

The most important symbols of Doyle's desire for integration however are the electricians' pipes he chances upon at the opening of the novel. Far from being as one critic insists[11], a reference to Magritte or an obvious Freudian symbol, Patrick's obsession with these pipes can be seen as another attempt to recover a lost wholeness, to bridge the gap between man and the universe and thus reharmonise his existence.

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[9] Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp.135-168, p.145.

[10] Samuel Beckett, 'Three Dialogues', Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1984), pp. 138-147, p.139.

[11] Macdonald Daly, 'Your Average Working Kelman', *Cencrastus*, No 43 (August 1993), 14-16, p. 14, p.15. Daly's rather *ad hominem* piece consistently misunderstands and misrepresents key moments of *A Disaffection*. For Daly, the novel is "complete absurd unadulterated shite." *A Disaffection* is simply another 'Glasgow novel' either depicting the denizens as uncouth or as clichéd inhabitants of a readily familiar Glasgow tradition.

> If he got the right tone or pitch then that would be it and the distinctions between them, and the gaps in time, all such elements would be part of what was important. (*D* 9)

> I suppose it's really I suppose because I need some kind of escape, to give my brains a rest. (*D* 136).

The last quotation here can be read in Schopenhauerian terms. Schopenhauer, himself a flautist, argues that only through aesthetic contemplation, including the experience of music, can the effects of the Will - desire, needs, lack - be momentarily suspended. Moreover, music brings us closer to the Platonic *eidos*, the Kantian noumenon, and brings a concomitant loss of individual subjectivity.

> At the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists. [...] Happiness and unhappiness have vanished.[12]

Through the pipes, therefore, Doyle conceives of how he might become "related to things as a totality, that old business of harmony, linked in the universal chain." (*D* 9-10) Piping produces a pure non-vocal sound, and thus an escape from words. Emblematic then of the conflict between the irrational world and man's desire for clarity, the soterial promise which the pipes initially represent is however, like much else in Doyle's life, frustrated - "He is going to take this pair of electrician's pipes and create harmony - no he isni" (*D* 115). This syntactic auto-cancellation is of course familiar in the work of Beckett, but as a symbol, the pipes trigger an allusion to Kafka.

> I am the Piper Doyle. I pipe. Up piped Doyle to enliven the proceedings. That story of Kafka's about the nice wee woman who is a vain mouse and who pipes a song of astonishing, of astonishing [sic] (*D* 211).

The story which Doyle remembers, 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk', is an earlier presentation of a defeated desire for transcendence. Piping for the mouse folk

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[12]Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E F J Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1966), I, p.197..

functions as a means whereby the individual "is set free from the fetters of daily life."[13] Josephine wants "public, unambiguous, permanent recognition of her art, going far beyond any precedent so far known. But while almost everything else seems within her reach, this eludes her persistently." It eludes her, and by implication Patrick, because when the piping stops, the piper is again left with "the struggle for existence". (368) Transport to another world or realm is either fleeting, illusory, or simply impossible. Indeed much of Kafka's work enacts precisely this doomed longing. Transcendence, be it in the quasi-religious quest for ultimate meaning, as in *The Trial* or *The Castle*; or the putative transcendence of 'art' (Josephine's piping in the story above) is never attainable. Franz Kuna sees Kafka as a writer for whom life is "balanced on a razor-edge between affirming the world we live in, and an irrepressible spiritual urge to transcend this world."[14] This paradoxicality, which is also a central motif in Beckett[15], fulfils a similar creative role in *A Disaffection*. Patrick is poised between this world, a place of alienation and frustration, and the presumed Elysium of some imagined other.

Doyle's pipes then "have got fuck all to do with Scotland" (*D* 24) and have everything to do with a Romantic longing for a lost wholeness, an impossible *Aufhebung*. Patrick's other focus of longing, both romantic and Romantic is his married colleague Alison. Within the novel, Alison functions in a way analogous to Tadzeu in *Death in Venice*, in that she serves as a screen upon which Doyle's imagination projects. *A Disaffection* reconveys a central tenet of Mann's text in that it depicts the consequences of an excessive Romantic imagination. Hence too, Doyle's identification with Goethe's Werther and his mention of Suzette Gontard - the latter

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[13] Franz Kafka, 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk', trans. Willa and Edwin Muir in *The Penguin Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp.360-376, p.370.

[14] Franz Kuna, 'The Janus-faced Novel: Conrad, Musil, Kafka, Mann' in eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane, *Modernism 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 443-452, p.449.

[15] For instance Richard Ellmann declares that "Beckett's work was to rest, or to be restless, amid [...] paradoxes." Richard Ellmann, 'Samuel Beckett: Nayman of Noland' in *Four Dubliners: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett* (London: Cardinal, 1988), pp. 79-104, p. 81.

the wife of a Frankfurt banker with whom Hölderlin had an affair[16]. Doyle equivocates between viewing Alison as a person - "Fucks sake she is just a woman and that's that. No paragon there" (*D* 89) - and as an object, a form, a solution.

> She was beautiful [...] he had never for one real and genuine minute imagined she could ever be here in this place, his house [...] quietly studying the book in hand, taking the weight of her body onto her left foot, the right leg bent at the knee. It was one of these poses, good kind of poses, classic; he could imagine being a sculptor and motioning her to the side a little, and back a little and so on, capturing the shadows of the folds in her coat, those long spiral shapes - curved cuboidals. (*D* 138)

Sculpted by Doyle's Romanticised imagination, Alison is transformed into a Platonic form. Again however Doyle's imagination is defeated. When in Miller's Bar Patrick touches Alison's hand, she becomes physical - Doyle realises that "she was human after all" (*D* 228) - and she tells Pat that it is not possible for them to have a relationship. Alison's rejection of Patrick is then a rejection of the possibility of either physical or metaphysical communion or redemption.

The constant hope of transcendent connection explains Patrick's proclivity for nostalgia. Both a word and a process which recur throughout the text, nostalgia by definition involves the perusal of what is past, what is eternally fixed.

> just maybe to do with a world that's past, over and done with, gone and never to return. I'm no saying there was anything good about it especially, I just think it's a bit sad, to think of it all. (*D* 324)

Symbolic of the desire for an Edenic age, nostalgia is explicitly connected with the pipes from the outset of the narrative: "He took a very long deep breath and once more he blasted out this long very deep sound. It was really beautiful. Of a crazy sort of nostalgia that would aye be impossible to describe in words". (*D* 1) Nostalgia, with its Greek roots, *nostos*, return home, *algos*, pain, is a kind of retroactive pursuit of

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[16]In his introduction to the Penguin *Selected Poems*, Michael Hamburger notes that "Susette was more to [Hölderlin] than a lover or mistress. She was the Platonic Diotima who transfigured [his] life and poetry." Michael Hamburger, 'Introduction' in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, ed. Jeremy Adler, trans. Michael Hamburger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), pp.xvii-xliii, p.xxi.

harmony, a quest for final settlement. Doyle describes himself as one who "quests" (*D* 125); his quest in the absurdist universe is formulated by Camus; it is one " in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, [...] it is as it were the first sign of absurdity." (*M* 19) Whilst Doyle rejects much of his past, the youthful ideals that took him to university and provided the motivation to be a schoolteacher, his nostalgia and therefore his longing for connection, persists. Doyle fits the Camusian portrait of a self that "can negate everything [...] except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion." (*M* 51)

Absurdity contaminates temporality. The need for cohesion which Camus describes becomes a retrospective pursuit. In Sartrean existentialism, the past represents the immutable being-in-itself of man. Doyle's nostalgia as a longing for something certain and fixed is then a mode of bad faith, a denial of human reality as a fundamental freedom.

> A man or a woman is an active being. Man therefore always tends towards the future, whereas surrender, abandon, letting go is present, or tends toward the past [...] sliminess and stickiness is contingency [...] whereas breaking free is toward the future.[17]

As in the earlier 'Not not while the giro', the desire for fixity is a form of self-objectification. Anxiety which arises from the realisation of freedom, prompts a reversal, a want for stasis; a desire for the fluid, open, future to be consumed by the fixed, closed, past. This need, as shown in the quotation above, is related to Sartre's concept of the 'sticky' consciousness. Its thematic relevance becomes apparent when Patrick sitting down to play the pipes, contemplates his recently consumed dinner:

> He put two hours as the period of proper gestation. The fish would have drowned by then, and the chips would have merged into his very parts, his very being; it would all have become part of his very flesh, forcing its way into his very character, his very psychology and personal traits being heightened by this solid mass of fish and fried potato. (*D* 55-6)

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[17] Sartre in Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (1981, rpt; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.316.

The glutinous mass of the food and the comic horror it induces can be read as a representation of the Sartrean *visqueux*. Sartre's model of authentic human consciousness is one of transparency and fluidity, but Doyle in seeing himself merge with the "solid mass" of his dinner depicts instead a consciousness which has become 'sticky' and indeterminate. Patrick

> needed things to be solid, if things were not solid how could he be expected to play things. This was the worst of it. But it was true. Things had to solid. If they were not solid, christ." (*D* 218)

Looking at the bars of an electric fire, Doyle imagines "being caught between the poles" and concludes that it "would be nice to be left that way forever." (*D* 57) This "halfway house" (D 58) of inertia only results in bad faith.

If nostalgia is connected with the unreachable past, its absurdist concomitant is a problematic future. Time is a problem because it is forever moving onward. Here Camus notably differs from Heidegger and to an extent Sartre. For Heidegger authenticity involves an acceptance that Dasein is a "being-toward-death"; for Sartre as discussed, human reality involves a conscious pro-jection into the future. Both Camus and Doyle however view the future and the passage of time as dread-full. Doyle's awareness of temporal transition surfaces forcefully when he visits the headmaster Milne.

> Old Milne was looking at him. Patrick looked back at him. Joseph K. was thirty when the bad things started happening and Jesus of Nazareth was thirty when he started preaching. Who else? (*D* 178)

The answer is provided by Camus:

> a time comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time and, by the horror that seizes him, he recognises his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. (*M* 20)

Patrick dreads the future. Temporality is of course central to Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein. Human being is temporality, Dasein is time[18]. For Heidegger, authenticity is ultimately achievable through an acceptance of Dasein as a being-toward-death. Sartrean thought contends that the future remains a *tabula rasa*, a nothingness, into which the individual projects himself. Doyle however identifies his horror of time as a consequence of his solitary condition.

> There is no point dwelling on the past. It is a thing he was wont to do. But this is because he is a single chap and single chaps are single persons ergo they dwell on the past and there is nothing wrong in dwelling on the past. How can you dwell on the future? There is nothing to dwell on! It doesni fucking exist. It is a fucking blank. Everything has yet to take place. This is what the future is, the place where things have yet to occur [...] The future is the nothing. (*D*161)

Two existential views compete in this passage. Doyle agrees with Sartre that the future is the "nothing" but recoils from filling it. To escape a contingent future for which he alone is responsible for shaping, Patrick again attempts to connect with the universal and the necessary. To do so, he employs a familiar Beckettian remedy: mathematics and arithmetic. For the narrator of *Company* "simple sums you find a help in times of trouble"[19], for the narrator of *The Unnameable*, there is "nothing more restful than arithmetic."[20] As a possible remedial, arithmetic seems to offer what language and the world do not: certainty and *a priori* truth. Thus Patrick's translation of his name into numbers, indicates an attempt to transcend language and efface his contingent, worldly, linguistic, identity.

A Disaffection is the record of Doyle's pursuit of a grounded self; assimilation within a world that is systematic, contained by universal rationality. He oscillates between awareness of the impossibility of his task - "he wasn't after any extra-terrestial point of communication" (*D* 153) - and an ever present desire for integration. Hence his obsession for mathematics and arithmetic, but also the Pythagoreans.

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[18] "Summing up, we may say: time is Dasein." Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, p.22E.
[19] Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p.29.
[20] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable*, p.357.

> The Pythagoreans called numbers 'figures'. The whole of matter could be reduced to them. Numbers or figures were the elemental parts, the constituents. And of course you have bodies still being called figures. Plus 'soh' 'lah' 'te' 'doh' etcetera being scales, numbers. Everything went together and could be reduced to numbers, even names of course. The initials P: D for instance, they could be reduced to 16: 4 based on the twenty-six letter roman alphabet; 4^2: 2^2, or even 2^4: 2^2. Numbers are great. You can do anything you like with them. Plus it gets you away from objects and entities [...] (*D* 36-7)

The initial p, when rendered into Greek becomes π, an infinite number. Either construction takes Patrick away from "objects and entities" both of which occupy a spatio-temporal location. As Jonathan Barnes points out, presocratic thought proposes that the principles of numbers constitutes an *arche*, or first principle of all things[21]. The Greek idea of *Kosmos*, generates the idea of an ordered or marshalled universe that is beautiful to contemplate a counterpoint to Patrick's inharmonious disorder. Presocratic thought searches for the *phusis*, the underlying essence of things, and concludes that this is number. For the Pythagoreans, number functions as an ultimate explanatory principle providing an ordered and harmonious *Kosmos*. Essentialist in its timbre, the Pythagorean model disregards chance and contingency. Richard Rorty links the development of mathematics with a particular epistemic shift in Greek thought toward an increasing occupation with universals. Rorty points out that "mathematics prides itself on overlooking individual details."[22] The notion that man and the world are submissible or reducible to a numerical and hence logical/rational explanation is of course challenged by existentialism. Again Doyle instantiates a paradox: numerical systems present transcendent truth, but the outset of the novel reveals Patrick as "the bloke who can show Gödel's Theorem to the average first-year class." (D14)

> To every ω-consistent recursive class κ of *formulae* there correspond recursive *class-signs r*, such that neither *v* Gen r nor Neg (*v* Gen r) belongs to Flg (κ) (where *v* is the free variable of *r*).[23]

[21] Ed. Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.44.

[22] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.38.

[23] Douglas R Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: The Eternal Golden Braid*

Gödel's Theorem, reproduced above, concerns propositions within an arithmetical or mathematical system and actually encompasses two theories. Rendered into propositional calculus, the first incompleteness theorem holds that in any system S of arithmetic, there will be a sentence P of the language S such that if S is consistent, neither P nor its negation are provable in S.[24] P for Patrick becomes this proposition which the system cannot accommodate. He cannot be absorbed within a numerical whole and this numerical system functions as an analogue of the state. With this we have the other existentially important textual motif: the individual and the system.

Making Doyle a schoolteacher, and thus someone with a university education allows the explicit inclusion of a series of cultural references; amongst which Hegel, Hölderlin, Goya, Kafka and the presocratics. Doyle's problematic occupation has another purpose however.

> I have speculated for some time as to the real reason why I resigned my post as a secondary-school teacher. Thinking it over now, it occurs to me that such a position was the very thing for me. Today it dawned on me: that was precisely the reason, I had to consider myself absolutely fitted for the job. So if I'd continued in it I had everything to lose, nothing to gain.[25]

In a text dominated by philosophical references, and at crucial moments by references to Kierkegaard, it seems critically suspect to view Doyle as the progeny of George Friel's *Mr Alfred MA*[26]. The first part of *Either/Or* is written by a school teacher who has resigned and, in common with Doyle, *is* resigned. He is not fit for the job. Kelman's text then, as well as a fictionalisation of Camusian motifs is in addition a

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(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.17.

[24] From ed. Jennifer Speake, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., (London: Pan, 1984), p.133.

[25] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hannay (1843, rpt.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p.50-1. Hereafter *E/O*.

[26] Such a position is held by Margery Palmer McCulloch. See her 'What Crisis in Scottish Fiction?: Creative Courage and Cultural Continuity in Novels by Friel, Jenkins and Kelman'. Douglas Gifford similarly claims that Kelman "is working in the tradition of enigmatic idealism so prevalent in modern Scottish fiction; the other classic of the pedagogic strain being George Friel's *Mr Alfred MA*." 'Decline in the West', *Books in Scotland*, no.30 (Spring 1989), 5-12, p.7.

rehearsal *in concreto*, of a contest between the Kierkegaardian and Hegelian philosophies.

Kierkegaard is mentioned twice in the text, the second time along with Hegel.

> Hegel was never near to insanity. He never was. Or so we are given to understand. He had a good cheery lifestyle as a student. He caroused with women and drink. [...] He caroused with women and drink and no doubt that is why Schopenhauer hated him. Kierkegaard didn't fucking like him either. (*D* 118)

Not quite. Schopenhauer, who described Hegel as "a repulsive and dull charlatan [...] an unparalleled scribbler of nonsense"[27], objected less to Hegel's private life and more to his philosophical system. For Schopenhauer, Hegelian thought is

> the attempt, [...] to comprehend the history of the world as a planned whole, or, as they call it, "to construct it organically," a crude and shallow *realism* is actually at the root of this [...] constructive histories, guided by a shallow optimism, always ultimately end in a comfortable, substantial fat State with a well-regulated constitution, good justice and police, useful arts and industries, and at most intellectual perfection, since this is in fact the only possible perfection, for that which is moral remains unaltered.[28]

This organiscist tendency and the Romantic elevation of the State is opposed by Schopenhauer, but it is Kierkegaard's objections to the all encompassing Hegelian system that constitute the beginning of existentialism *qua* philosophy. Like Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard objects to the lack of moral space in the Hegelian system. Both agree that the Hegelian system is back to front. For Schopenhauer, "concepts should arise through abstraction from intuitive perceptions, and hence the latter should exist before the former."[29] For Kierkegaard, Hegel has "forgotten" the ethical

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[27] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E F J Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1966), ii, p.70.

[28] Ibid., ii, pp.442-3. A valuable discussion of Schopenhauer's views of the Hegelian state may be found in Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, trans. Ewald Osers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp.230-2. See also Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[29] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. E F J Payne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), ii, p.627.

existing individual, and it is this antimony, systematised objectivity against particularised subjectivity, abstract *Geist* against concrete individuality, which Kierkegaard formalises and Kelman's novel enacts. Thus when MacDonald Daly complains that Kelman's text lacks "a Hegelian conceptual framework"[30], he rather misses the point. The novel is precisely an existential challenge to the Hegelian notion that such conceptualisation is possible. This is why Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer are so important.

As discussed, Kierkegaard rejects the conceptualisation and abstract tendency inherent in Hegelian thought. The tendency toward abstraction is something of which Doyle is aware: "conceptualising. Creating a distance already [...] that was the kind of thing he always seemed to be doing nowadays." (*D* 9). For Kierkegaard, abstract thoughts of the Hegelian kind, and abstract thinkers in general, "abandon existence", disregarding the "definite something"[31] that an individual is. Hegelian systematicity wants "to answer systematically a question that has the remarkable quality that it cannot be raised systematically." (*CUP* 174) For the objective or systematic thinker, "individuals fade away into humankind [...] it is impossible to discover you and me, an individual existing human being, even if new magnifying glasses for the concrete are invented." (*CUP* 350) The task of the subjective thinker is to "*understand himself in existence*" (*CUP* 351). However, conceptualisation as propounded by Hegel lifts the individual out of existence and thereby negates the concrete:

> This was him off with the concepts again. Theoretical webs, dirty webs, fusty webs; old and shrivelling away into nothingness, a fine dust. Who needs that kind of stuff. Far better getting out into open air and doing it, actually doing it, something solid and concrete and unconceptualisable. (*D* 10)

Doyle quests after "genuine authenticity" (ibid.), achievable only at an individual level, but as a schoolteacher, his daily life is spent in the service of the state.

> Being a teacher caused people to spend their lives worrying out concepts, postulating this that and the next thing, all manner of

[30]Macdonald Daly, 'Your Average Working Kelman', p.16.
[31]Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p.301. Hereafter *CUP*.

> hypothesising. The further from activity the better. Please allow us to conceptualise your problem, thus we can attain a sensation of nourishment ergo that your problem, though not yet solved, has been conceptualised. (*D* 86)

The tendency to conceptualise, to ponder rather than act, is linked explicitly to Doyle's occupation. For Hegel, the absolute universal end is the state, having as it does "absolute power over everything individual and particular, over life, property, and the latter's rights."[32] The state is "a wholly spiritual entity" (ibid., §335, p.369) but it is the real effects of this "web", this "spiritual entity", which bind and frustrate Doyle. For Kierkegaard therefore, the individual needs to abandon the life of the state; must realise that he

> has his teleology within him, has an inner teleology, is himself his own teleology, and his self, then, is the goal for which he strives. This self of his is not, however, an abstraction, but absolutely concrete. (*E/O* 561)

Doyle becomes a paradigm of Kierkegaardian conflict wherein one's "whole nature is in contradiction with itself". Kierkegaard maintains that "you can only get out of this contradiction with an either/or." (*E/O* 477) An individual must choose the possibility of choice. In this context, an early conversation in the staffroom over whether one should drink and drive, assumes greater symbolic status than its ostensible subject matter suggests.

> It was a case of either/or, the drink or the car.
> Patrick gaped at him. Is that the truth?
> Yeh.
> For fuck sake.
> It would be impossible for him! said Alison. (*D* 40-1))

This impossibility must however be overcome, for to remain a schoolteacher is to be a part of the state apparatus which dissolves his individuality.

> One never accepts any *vocational responsibility*. If one does so, one simply becomes Mr Anybody, a tiny little pivot in the machinery of the

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[32] G W F Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H B Nisbet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), §323, p.360.

> corporate state; you cease to direct your own affairs, and then theories can be of little help. (*E/O* 238)

Patrick is aware of the need for decision:

> it was definitely the sort of situation, the kind that it was burdensome to remove from, to just carry on within, it was even just carrying on in the company for fuck sake that was difficult and to be able to reach freedom, to be able to get out from under this and away, away, gone, freedom, liberation [...] (*D* 42)

But he is "not able to make a decision and stick by it" (*D* 63). His attempt to flee the city, which he correctly equates with "a distinct manifestation of the existential leap" (*D* 69) results in a u-turn, and a heading back to Glasgow, the city in which he feels alienated. To attain true subjectivity, Patrick has to confront the problems of his existence and act, choose. Patrick's 'real' either/or is not then a choice between the consumption of alcohol and safe motoring practise but between continuing service in the abstract state, where his position is not free because determined, or attaining true subjectivity. Systems are finished and final products, but human existence is a becoming.

Doyle recites the Hegelian precept "the individual has to succumb to reason" (*D* 273) but forgets his earlier assertion that "there [is] little to trust in reason" (*D* 8) He becomes a focal point of two antagonistic philosophies, existentialism and essentialism. Within the text, the ordered universe of the pythagorean *kosmos* has its idealistic analogue in Hegelian thought. The idea of an all embracing *Geist*, within which Doyle is merely a part has, like its similarly inclusive Pythagorean precursor with its numerical essentialism, to be rejected.

The judge who narrates the second part of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, and who represents the ethical as against the aesthetic mode of existence, accuses the schoolteacher who narrates the first of thinking "too abstractly". (*E/O* 455) Abstracting or conceptualising becomes a "sedative" (*E/O* 514). Patrick's tendency for intellectual divagation results in a continual postponement of choice, and so he remains static, ontologically indeterminate.

> What is to be chosen stands in the deepest relationship to the chooser, and when the choice concerns a problem of life the individual must naturally go on living at the same time; so the longer he postpones the choice the easier it is to modify it, even though he keeps on deliberating and deliberating. (*E/O* 482)

Doyle himself makes the connection between an excess of deliberation and a corresponding inactivity.

> This very very astonishingly bad habit of waiting and waiting before getting off the arse to go to lavatories was symptomatic of his life. There had to be a connection between it and things of mammoth import. (*D* 285)

Nicola, his brother's wife, identifies Patrick's malaise. She thinks he is in a rut (*D* 269), that he is not committing himself (*D* 312), something recognised also by one of his pupils - "what ye do ye start all these things and then ye dont finish them or even just follow them through properly." (*D* 196) He has been brought to the moment of existential awareness, this is what the novel is about, but he cannot 'leap', "that fucking leap you always had to make to begin things." (*D* 55) Doyle cannot 'leap' because he continually conceptualises; he wants systems or other people to determine what his actions should be: this is his rut. His need for external direction reaches its ironic apogee when Doyle the schoolteacher looks to his pupils for guidance.

> I want some advice to do with my immediate plans. What I feel is I'm not enjoying being the person who teaches and if I canni do it here I don't want to do it anywhere. I'm saying to ye that there is a bit of crisis in my life. I'm sick of being alone and being a teacher in a society that I say I detest all the time, to the extent that the term 'detest' isni really appropriate christ because it's a form of obscenity. (*D* 248)

One pupil, Paul Moore, re-enacts the accusatory look of Doyle's father. "Paul Moore looked at Patrick and Patrick eventually looked away from the wee bastard who had gazed right into his heart and seen something rotten." (*D* 248). This recalls an earlier passage:

> that was always the way of it with him, everyfuckingwhere, with the family and all the rest of it this continually seeing the mirror image, casting doubt upon your motives. It was hopeless. (*D* 96)

In the boy's look, his father's look, and in his own reflected image, Patrick sees his life judged. He wants to escape, he "could crawl into a corner. He could crawl under his desk." (*D* 248) Escape is illusory. Instead, Doyle's hopelessness and inability to act modulate into apathy. He declares himself "so fucking belaboured with boredom" (*D* 92), "just biding, biding" (*D* 99). A corrosive and debilitating ennui is a constant in the work of Dostoevsky and permeates Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*. Dostoevsky's underground man is "bored with constantly doing nothing" (*N* 123); in this Doyle follows but he adds a Beckettian note:

> What was to be done. Nothing. (*D* 3)
>
> So what's to be done? Nothing. Nothing at all.
> That temptation.
> There is no temptation. None whatsoever.
> None whatsoever. On the contrary: (*D* 173)

Patrick reiterates Estragon's "nothing to be done", the opening lines, and constant refrain of *Waiting for Godot*. The passage above, in which the colon calls for a contrary which does not come, alludes also to the play's construction wherein stage directions undercut, nihilate, the speech of the characters. One option is that which Didi and Gogo attempt: suicide. "So what is to be done what is to be done aside that is from suicide. Aside from suicide." (*D* 173) As a constant possibility, suicide haunts the novel. For Camus, suicide can take one of two forms: physical suicide, the taking of one's own life, or philosophical suicide, the belief in systems, determinism, and the elevation of logic. Doyle's frustrated love for his married colleague, with its invocation of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* represents the first.

> How did young Werther accomplish the deed. It is a couple of years since Pat read the novel. And the parallels! Christ, he hadni even thought of that. Young lover on behalf of
> beautiful-but-not-to-be-got-young-lass. (*D* 80)

The second form of suicide is foregrounded throughout the novel. It is what Camus describes as explaining the world with "bad reasons" (*M* 13). In an attempt to imbue human life with meaning, the individual seeks shelter in the underground man's

"Crystal Palace". Although the final page of the novel still finds him pondering suicide's "temptation", Doyle appears ultimately to reject self-destruction - "fuck off. That includes Werther" (*D* 258) Doyle's tendency to postpone choice and action suggest however that he still remains subject to philosophical suicide and this tempers his declaration of resignation. Hamlet's famous aporetic rumination on whether to be, or not to be is quoted in the text. Ironically, whilst Hamlet eventually overcomes procrastination and acts, Patrick's aporia only intensifies as the novel advances.

> He did not know what to do. Not any longer, he just didni know. He didni know what was right and what was not right, what was wrong and what was not wrong that being not wrong, that being right He did not know what to do. (*D* 303-4)

For Patrick, the 'Glasgow Hamlet'[33], not knowing what to do collapses into nothing to be done and the seduction of surrender - "resignation for christ sake what a temptation." (*D* 84)

> I'm just no sure. I'm just no sure. But I'm resigned. I'm resigned. Christ I think that's what it is, I'm resigned. This is me realising it for the first time. There ye are. That's one thing. That's the one thing. (*D* 317)

Doyle's last words, "fuck off, fuck off" (*D* 337), recalls the stoical ending of Beckett's *Rockaby*, "fuck life"[34], but simultaneously the resignation which Camus attributes to Sisyphus. "Crushing truths perish from being acknowledged" (*M* 109): Camus' declaration insists that lucid awareness of the absurd is the only victory which an individual can achieve in an absurd universe.

> If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his

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[33]This sobriquet is borrowed from Karl Miller. Miller makes several useful comparisons between Shakespeare's protagonist and Patrick Doyle. Karl Miller, 'Glasgow Hamlet', *Authors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 156-162.

[34] Samuel Beckett, *Rockaby*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp.431-448, p.448.

> wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn. (*MS* 109)

The doubled "fuck off" registers the scorn of the rebel, but simultaneously the repetition indicates his Sisyphean fate. Camus noticeably asserts that Sisyphus' existence is a tragic one. Tragedy denotes ineluctability, and *A Disaffection* suggests similarly that the situation of the individual cannot be transcended. Like Beckett however, Kelman injects humour into his narrative as tragedy's concomitant. In its use of humour and despair, contradiction and paradox, the narrative assumes a form of juxtaposed contrariety. *A Disaffection* is a Beckettian tragicomedy. The tragi-comic urge, a paradigm of the paradoxical, exists in the philosophers with which the text contends. For Schopenhauer, whose pessimism pervades Beckett's fictions, "the life of every individual, viewed as a whole [...] is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy."[35] This amalgamation is similarly foreshadowed in Kierkegaard:

> That the subjective existing thinker is just as positive as negative can [...] be expressed by saying that he has just as much of the comic as of pathos. [...] The pathos that is not safeguarded by the comic is an illusion; the comic that is not safeguarded by pathos is immaturity." (*CUP* 87)

Positivity and negativity coexist in the character of Doyle. Tragicomedy presents the perfect literary mode for a fiction dealing with stasis and inertia. This paradoxical contiguity informs the narrative structure and seems more apposite to a fictional reconveying of absurdity given Camus' insistence that one must preserve the paradox.

As is evidenced by the foregoing, Kelman's aesthetic of contradiction need not and perhaps should not be read as a nod to a Scottish tradition of antisyzygy, and yet such an assertion has gained critical currency. Gavin Wallace sees *A Disaffection* as a novel of despair going on to claim despondency induced by contradictoriness as a Scottish literary paradigm, Wallace implicitly links Kelman to a Scottish tradition of antisyzygy:

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[35] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, i, p.322.

> Paradox and contradiction of this kind is nothing new in Scottish letters, of course. Whether conscious or unconscious, for better or for worse, duality, division and fracture persist as the prevailing critical tools in Scotland. That the antisyzygy fast approaching its centenary sizzles still is a source of concern and puzzlement to newer, younger critics, but it would be difficult to deny the continuing relevance of the fundamental issues of contradictoriness and paradox to the Scottish imagination.[36]

Paradox and contradictoriness are "nothing new" in Russian fiction either, but Wallace assumes that native incidence equates to native influence and he suggests that *A Disaffection* is a work which proceeds from the tradition which he delineates. As I have shown, the novel's structure of contradictory paradoxicality, does not emanate from these indigenous forms - *A Disaffection* is not a reheating of Stevenson, and Kelman is as far from MacDiarmid as he is from Eveleyn Waugh - but to a tradition at least as old as *A Hero of Our Time* (published in the same year Stevenson was born). Contradiction and paradox are features of Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Camus, Beckett, features of literary existentialism and prevalent too in more formal philosophical discourse: Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* contains two antagonous accounts of existence. These then are the traditions Kelman utilises, these are the authors he maintains as having exerted an influence upon his own fictions. This is not however to belittle, or somehow culturally invalidate these native forms, this would be anathema to Kelman's literary project, but to misplace, misread, or misunderstand Kelman as part of such a 'Scottish tradition' is equally remiss. In particular, if one accepts MacDiarmid's *Drunk Man* as both a paradigm and zenith of antisyzygy, then the attempt to situate *A Disaffection* in its wake collapses. MacDiarmid's synthetic language, his nationalism, cultural or otherwise, his reliance upon history and myth, are all wholly absent from Kelman's work. Indeed, Kelman's writing, particularly within *A Disaffection*, can be seen as an existential riposte to the Hegelianism[37] of MacDiarmid.

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[36] Gavin Wallace, 'Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity' in eds. Wallace and Stevenson, *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp.217-231, p.218.

[37] "I'll hae nae hauf way hoose, but aye be whaur/ Extremes meet" is arguably not as Kenneth Buthlay claims a Nietzschean principle, but a restating of the Hegelian dialectic which seeks a reconcilation of both thesis and antithesis in a new synthesis. This it seems to me is the fundamental compositional method of MacDiarmid's text.

As a character, Patrick Doyle is foreshadowed in a variety of existential texts. Bellow's *Herzog* presents a hero in a cloacal city, troubled by Hegel - whom he curses for rendering him "sick with abstractions" (129) - who carries a volume of Kierkegaard in his pocket. Like Doyle, Herzog conducts conversations with himself and writes imaginary letters to a litany of philosophers. Bellow dramatises the problematic formation of identity. Herzog tells us that "modern character is inconstant, divided, vacillating, lacking the firm stone-like certitude of archaic man, also deprived of the firm ideas of the seventeenth century, clear, hard theorems." (113). Although critical of Heidegger and German existentialism ("preachers of dread"), Herzog expounds that a "consciousness when it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself." (280). Both Herzog and Doyle inhabit this space in which certainties have been excised by vagaries. Identity is no longer stable and certain, but in a state of flux. There is no harmonious *Kosmos* as there is no harmonious *polis*. Cairns Craig writes

> The ideal city community has dissolved into isolated and terrorised individuals, who in turn are dissolving into fragmentary and multiple individuals, an inner disharmony to match the outer chaos. The problem for Kelman's protagonists is that the ideal of community which they seek is unenvisageable ahead of them: it is already lost and defeated in the past. That is why, for Doyle, the year 1770 accumulates significance: it is the year of Hegel and Hölderlin's birth, of Beethoven's, of Wordsworth's, of the birth of revolution in the Americas. It is the year in which germinates the great harmonies of romantic music and the vision of a harmonious citizenry [...] The harmonies of that romantic assault upon the traditional order of reality turn into madness.[38]

Thus too, Doyle's obsession with Goya, particularly the 'black' paintings. produced during Goya's isolation in the *Quinta del sordo*[39]. However it is his most famous aquatint, *El sueño de la razon produce monstruos*, with its central image of the solitary self surrounded by furies that is most apposite here. Hegel's attempt to

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Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, 1926 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p.14. Buthlay's annotation is on p.15.

[38]Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', p.112.

[39]See Janis Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes 1746-1828* (London: Phaidon, 1994)

dissolve all in the absolute has failed. Under assault from the Romantics, the Enlightenment enshrinement of rationality has collapsed, reason no longer accounts for everything, but as Goya foretold, the sleep of reason has indeed brought forth monsters. Those "hard theorems" of the Enlightenment, mourned by Herzog, grounded the self and provided a structure. In the modern world, shorn of such certainty, the self is abandoned and attempts to make way amidst, and make itself out of, contradictions. Thus in his embittered ennui, Doyle is also a twentieth century Pechorin: "I was born with a passion for contradiction. My whole life has been nothing but a series of dismal, unsuccessful attempts to go against heart or reason"[40]. Doyle is a hero of our time. *A Disaffection* does not close, suggesting that like Lermontov's text, what is intended is a portrait but of a particular kind: one which is confined to the elaboration of an 'is', not one which suggests an ought, suggests a solution. As the novel ends, Patrick is left to his struggle. In his next novel however, Kelman offers a glimpse of escape.

[40] Mikhail Yur'evich Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, 1839/40, trans. Paul Foote (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.98.

Chapter Six

In Camera: *How Late it Was, How Late*

"Where is the master going?" "I don't know," I said, just
out of here, just out of here. Out of here, nothing else, it's the
only way I can reach my goal." "So you know your goal?" he asked.
"Yes," I replied, "I've just told you. Out of here - that's my goal."
Franz Kafka, 'The Departure'.[1]

A man evaporates without an eye-witness.
Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Reprieve*.[2]

It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen.
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*.[3]

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[1]'The Departure', trans. Tania and James Stern, *The Penguin Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, p.449.
[2]Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Reprieve*, 1945, trans. Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.168.
[3]Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1947 (New York: Vintage, 1972), p.3.

Like *A Disaffection*, Kelman's Booker Prize winning *How Late it Was, How Late*, begins with an allusion to *Notes from Underground*. The protagonist Sammy Samuels proclamatory "ye're no a good man, ye're just no a good man" recalls the underground man's self diagnosis: "I am a sick man ...I am an angry man". The first sentence of *How Late* proceeds for seven lines without the interruption of a full stop, recalling the rapidity of the dialogue, and the confessional interrogative quality with which *Notes from Underground* begins. It further shares with Dostoevsky's text a certain garrulousness and also an implied reader: the first word of the novel is "ye" and the monologues of Sammy/the narrator frequently contain asides addressed to this extra-textual "you". But inside this narrative form there lurks an ambiguity. Whilst the usage of "you" suggests a reaching out from the novel, a contacting with the reader, it might also suggest an unseen, tacit audience within the text itself.

> This is very deliberately written in the voice of a man who could be an acquaintance of the central character, an acquaintance of the man that goes blind, and also he is telling the story to other men and the ideal setting would be a pub. So you could say that this story is told by a man to other men in a pub and he is telling the story about another guy, and this other guy is a guy who would normally be drinking in the same pub with the same people.[4]

Kelman's use of "could" both qualifies his statement and prohibits the possibility of the author defining the writing, the ambiguity is ours to resolve or maintain. Furthermore, whilst immediately reminiscent of Dostoevsky, the combination of a confessional mode and the frequent use of the second person pronoun suggests also an Augustinian component. The title of the novel hints at this: in his *Confessions* Augustine writes "Too late I loved Thee [...] too late". This passage continues "Thou flashest, shonest and scatteredst my blindness"[5]. Literal and metaphorical notions of blindness and sight are of course essential elements in both texts. Augustine's work records his transition from benighted sinner, to salvation through the attainment of

[4] 'K is for Culture', p.26.

[5] *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. E B Pusey (London: Dent, 1907), book X, section xxvii, p.227. I am grateful to Cairns Craig for pointing this out. Kelman's title also seems to relate to a passage from *The Busconductor Hines*: "One might start off by too late it is too late, too fucking late, it is too fucking late for the shite, for this imbecilic carry on; it is too late. The problem is that it is too late." (*BH* 98)

faith in Christianity. In Kelman's novel, this idea of personal quest is activated by Sammy describing himself as "the bold yin" (*HL* 83, 84)[6]. However Sammy's journey is a reverse of the Augustinian one. Instead of opening his eyes to the light of God, Sammy moves from vision to blindness: his eyes shut.

The Augustinian parallel persists though, for *How Late*, like the *Confessions*, is a text concerned with both the inner and the individual. As Charles Taylor points out, Augustine authors a discourse of radical inwardness and for this Taylor sees him as a seminal figure in Western thought.[7] Kelman's novel certainly shares in this type of subjectivity but what is of greater significance is that Augustine exerted an influence upon Heidegger[8] and in Kelman's novel, Heideggerian concepts are again of considerable exegetical use. In *How Late*, the punctuation of the opening lines, a succession of commas and semicolons, gives a fluid, seamless quality to Sammy's initial stream of consciousness but this is halted, one might say *arrested*, by Sammy's "edging back into awareness of where ye are" (*HL* 1). In common with all of Kelman's fiction, the initial narrative plunge mimics formally the Heideggerian 'thrownness' of the existential subject. Accordingly, Sammy's initial thoughts move from his condition to his position: "Where in the name of fuck ... He was here" (*HL* 1). Consciousness 'wakes' and finds itself positioned within the situation which constitutes its facticity, and the factic "here" quickly assumes a sinister quality. Within the text, the Dostoevskian fades and a more insidious, Kafkaesque quality is introduced. "He was here, he was leaning against auld rusty palings, with pointed spikes, some missing or broke off." (*HL* 1) These palings and spikes immediately suggest encirclement, entrapment, the bars of a prison. Imprisonment entails both

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[6]This idea of quest is bolstered by Samuels' absent girlfriend. Her name, Helen, suggesting a Homeric parallel.

[7]"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to Western thought." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 131.

[8]For details see Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and George Steiner, *Heidegger*, 2nd rev edn. (London: Fontana, 1992). Steiner describes Augustine as "so often Heidegger's predecessor" particularly for his notion of individualised temporality. (102)

curtailed liberty but also a prisoner and a jailer and thus from its outset, *How Late* signals that its existential subject matter will be a by now familiar one: freedom.

James Wood, Booker judge for the 1994 competition, partially defended his award of the prize to *How Late*, by situating Kelman's work within a significant strand of European literature. Kelman's work has prestigious forebears.

> Kelman writes a kind of prison literature. The principle of such writing - in some of Céline, in Camus' *La Peste*, in Solzhenitsyn, in Breytenbach's *Memoirs of an Albino Terrorist* - is a luxurious oppresiveness whereby the smallest things, like getting an extra gram of bread per day, or looking at timetables for trains out of the sealed city of Oran as Camus' narrator does, are subjected to intense scrutiny. Eventually these small things become the *only* things, and hence metaphysically important and narratologically suspenseful. [...] Some of these writers describe real prisons; but all of them mean the prison of life, the sentence that cannot be commuted.[9]

As Wood records, prisons are twofold; they can be either literal or metaphorical. Wood mentions Camus, and it is precisely this duality, this interplay between the literal and the metaphorical which is suggested in the passage from *Robinson Crusoe* which Camus places at the outset of *The Plague*: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not!"[10] *The Plague* itself is frequently read metaphorically as a commentary upon occupied France during the second world war.

How Late also depicts circumscription in various ways. Sammy, as a fictional character, is first of all contained between the pages of the novel. As a fictional subject in a fictional world, he is contained within Glasgow (the reader never *sees* him leave the city); contained in various rooms (be they police cells or his own house); and the onset of blindness contains him within himself. His loss of sight also occasions a protracted involvement with the State. As we shall see however, the most important means of containment, existentially speaking, to which Sammy is subject, is 'the look'. Despite then his use of "luxurious", an anomalous adjective when discussing

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[9]James Wood, 'In Defence of Kelman', *The Guardian*, 25 October 1994, p. 9.
[10]Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, 1947 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

the inhabitants of Kelman's fictions, Wood is correct in identifying oppresiveness and the scrutiny of the small as central concerns of the prison literature he delineates, for restricted freedom necessitates a limited perceptual or experiential horizon; a focus limited to the near at hand. This scrutiny of the small is illustrated on the first page of the novel where we find Samuels pondering the whereabouts of his shoes, his "leathers", which have been mysteriously replaced by a pair of too small trainers. There is then much to commend in Wood's analysis - importantly he positions Kelman within a European discourse - but there are however significant omissions in his roster. This chapter will argue that Kelman's novel does indeed depict Sammy as being 'imprisoned' and further, that his place of incarceration is a 'prison' which has its bars drawn from Beckett, Kafka and Sartre.

Both *The Trial* and 'Metamorphosis' begin with the protagonists awakening into fantastic situations. Gregor Samsa and Joseph K. are imprisoned in their separate ways; the former confined within the body of a beetle, the latter is literally arrested but this is to symbolise a more fundamental internment within the labyrinthine structures of an indefinite state apparatus - K. remember is never placed within a bricks and mortar prison. Sammy Samuels wakes too, though not in his bed, nor even in a house, but "in a corner" (*HL* 1). Joseph K. awakes to persons unknown; when Sammy regains consciousness, the first people he sees he mistakes for tourists.

> He shook his head and glanced up the way; people - there were people there; eyes looking. These eyes looking. Terrible brightness and he had to shield his own cause of it, like they were godly figures and the light coming from them was godly or something but it must just have been the sun high behind them [...] Maybe they were tourists. (*HL* 2)

This segment triggers a further literary intimation. With its focus upon brightness and vision, the passage repeats and recasts certain significant moments from Beckett's *Happy Days* - indeed David Buckley's review of the novel proposed that Sammy was a "Beckett hero buried a foot deeper in the sand".[11] Buried in a mound of earth, Beckett's most famous internee is both literally and metaphorically confined - Sammy's containment, although hinted at by the palings, has yet to be fully described

[11]David Buckley, 'Darkness invisible', *The Observer*, Review Section, 3 April 1994, p.19.

- but if we compare the texts further, a common imagistic sequence begins to emerge. Sammy's "godly light", recalls Winnie's rehearsal of Milton - "holy light [...] blaze of hellish light"[12] - but also Beckett's staging specifications: "Blazing light" (ibid. 138). Kelman's inclusion of the Miltonic allusion prepares us for Sammy's blindness. Winnie is buried in the centre of an "expanse of scorched grass" (ibid.); Sammy awakes in a "bed of grassy weeds" (*HL* 1). The stage directions prefacing Winnie's opening speech have her "gazing at zenith" (ibid. 138), a movement mimicked in the passage above by Sammy's upward glance. Like Sammy, Winnie is also the subject of inquisitive glances from (presumed) tourists; in Winnie's case a Mr and Mrs Shower/Cooker (ibid. 155-7). These characters are pivotal to an understanding of the play. In a letter to Alan Schneider, Beckett pointed out that he derived the character names "Shower" and "Cooker" from the German *schauen* (to look) and *gucken* (to peep), going on to state that they "represent the onlooker (audience) wanting to know the meaning of things."[13] The incidence of perceptual motifs caused some critics to see Beckett's play as both a dramatisation of Berkeley's *esse* is *percepi*[14], and a modulation of the Cartesian cogito, where I *think* therefore I am becomes I *speak* therefore I am. Within such an analysis, both Willie and the audience function as Winnie's 'witnesses', each symbolising her need for Others in order that she may *be*. Kelman's text whilst echoing and absorbing these and other Beckettian qualities, simultaneously accommodates elements which echo Kafka and Sartre. Whereas Winnie needs others - she needs to speak, to be seen, to be heard - Sammy Samuels requires precisely the opposite: he needs to vanish.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* records that the English 'look' is etymologically linked to the German *lugen* meaning 'to spy'. The look to which Sammy is subject evolves into such a malevolent surveyal and so the oppresiveness and scrutiny to which James Wood refers now commingle. Scrutiny, and observation in various forms, become the vehicles for the conveyance of a particular oppression.

[12]*Happy Days*, p.140. See also *Paradise Lost*, Book III, lines 1 *ff.*
[13]Ed. Maurice Harmon, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.95.
[14]See for instance Beryl S. and John Fletcher, *A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 37 and p. 149. Berkeley makes this claim in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.

The imagery which the text deploys thus coalesces around a Kafkan[15] construal of an omniscient state which surreptitiously monitors its subjects - it is worth remembering here that the dust-jacket of *How Late* features the symbol for a police camera. If read in this way, the light from above in which Sammy is bathed, loses its celestial Miltonic quality and hints instead at the blinding light of an interrogation room. Likewise, the eyes with which he is observed belong not to bemused tourists, but to an interrogator, an accuser.

> How come they were all looking at him? This yin with the big beery face and these cunning wee eyes [...] he was watching; no watching but fucking staring, staring right into Sammy [...] Fuck ye! Sammy gave him a look back [...] he caught sight of the tourists again. Only they werenay tourists, no this time anyway they were sodjers, fucking bastards, ye could smell it; even without the uniforms. A mile away. Sammy knew them, ye can aye tell, their eyes; if ye know these eyes then ye aye see them, these kind of eyes they stay with ye. (*HL* 3)

To foreground the importance of a particular look, twelve words in this passage are either perceptual or ocular cognates. In a kind of delayed decoding, the 'tourists' *metamorphose* into policemen ("sodjers"), enforcers of state legislature. Under this gaze of authority, Samuels feels himself to be caught and the novel moves quickly from his visual 'arrest' to its physical correlate. Sammy first fights with and then flees from the policemen, but they catch him and dispense a retaliatory beating: "he was fuckt, fuckt, he couldnay break loose, he fucking couldnay, they had him, they fucking had him." (*HL* 6) Here, syntax reinforces sense: the repeated phrases working to underline Sammy's containment. Although clearly evident here, the imprisonment/freedom dialectic which *How Late* investigates is more explicitly highlighted in an earlier draft of the novel's opening chapter. Whilst still in progress, Kelman published an extract in the magazine *Parcel of Rogues* which foregrounds more noticeably the novel's central concern. "Escape. But ye cannay escape, escape is the thing ye can never do, the one thing, surrounded on all sides by flesh and bone, there's nay escape."[16] Cranial enclosure and spatial confinement again take the reader

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[15]I borrow this term, discussed in chapter one, from Milan Kundera.
[16]James Kelman, 'Untitled - From a Novel in Progress', in *Parcel of Rogues* (Stromness, Orkney: Clocktower Press, [n.d.]), pp. 14-19, p. 14.

back to Beckett. In *The Trilogy* for instance the narrator, who like Samuels frequently addresses an implied reader, states:

> You may say it is all in my head, and indeed sometimes it seems to me I am in a head and that these eight, no, six, these six planes that enclose me are of solid bone"[17]

Kelman's eventual excision of the passage from the published novel suggests that during the writing process, he discovered either a way in which Sammy can escape, or that he wished to foreground a different form of imprisonment.

Whilst imprisonment within the skull continues throughout - Sammy describes himself, again in quasi-Beckettian terms, as inhabiting a "dark cavern of mental solitude" (*HL* 190) - the novel proceeds to underscore Sammy's metaphorical confinement by the addition of literal confinement. The second time he wakes in the novel, Sammy finds himself in a police cell. "He didnay know where the fuck he was. He looked about [...] There was a screw watching. Ye could tell. [...] The screw again. Sammy thought he could see the eye in the gloom." (*HL* 7). Noticeably, the "screw" gazes with "the eye"; and this conjunction is repeated each time he appears in the narrative. Through the persistent use of the definite article a subtle and yet substantial transposition is effected whereby the eye shifts from being that of an individual into that of universal authority. This combination of vision and domination permits the conjunction of Sartre and Kafka. For the former, "the eye is not at first apprehended as a sensible organ of vision but as a support for the look" (*(BN* 258). Now, given that this segment of the novel is situated in a cell, the Sartrean look begins its association with authority and the Kafkan state. This alliance between vision and authority makes itself apparent through a more noticeable symbolic aspect, for the singular eye points to the gaze of a Cyclops effecting a further emblem of incarceration given that the Cyclopes were credited with constructing the walls which

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[17] *The Beckett Trilogy*, p.203. See also S E Gontarski's introduction to the *Nohow On* trilogy, 'The Conjuring of Something Out of Nothing: Samuel Beckett's "Closed Space" Novels.' in Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (1980-83; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1996), pp.vii - xxvii.

enclose ancient, pre-Greek cities.[18] "Brick walls, brick walls" (*HL* 320) are both physical and metaphysical symbols.

Whilst the 'screw' is able to look, Sammy upon wakening again, finds himself blind. Sammy's blindness constitutes the most significant 'plot' aspect of the novel but curiously, he treats his loss of sight with relative equanimity, describing it as "just a new predicament." (*HL* 10) This matter of factness suggests that Kelman's realism is not that of Balzac or of McIlvanney or Archie Hind, but that of Kafka. It is as mentioned in chapter one, a 'fantastic' realism. As Sartre points out, Kafka's heroes - specifically Samsa, and the surveyor K.- are never surprised by the situations into which they are thrown[19]. Read against this Kafkan background, Sammy's blindness becomes an analogue of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis. "What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream."[20] Samsa's words are restated by Sammy: "[it's] no a nightmare. It wasnay. It was just a thing happening to him." (*HL* 39). For both Kafka and Kelman, what is important therefore is not whether a man can *actually* wake up blind, or *actually* wake up transformed into a beetle, but what such transformations reveal or are intended to reveal, and it is at this level that realism enters. The metaphorical or symbolic component attaching to his situation is alluded to by Sammy himself. Blindness he tells us "was just a new problem. He had to cope with it, that's all, that was all it was. Every day was a fucking problem. And this was a new yin." (*HL* 37) Sammy's blindness then is not intended as a straightforwardly realistic 'fact' but rather as a structural device which discloses certain aspects of ontological/existential significance.

Within the novel, blindness accrues existential weight for three reasons. Firstly, it suggests the existentialist rejection of the traditional empirical/rational construal of man as a passive *observer* of events. As discussed in chapter one, existentialists argue that man is a subject or actor in the world. Sight loss necessarily defeats any attempt at achieving this observer status; Sammy can no longer stand back and observe the

[18]See Betty Radice, *Who's Who in the Ancient World: A Handbook to the Survivors of the Greek and Roman Classics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.96.
[19]Jean-Paul Sartre, '*Aminadab* or the Fantastic Cansidered as Literature', *Literary Essays*, p.65.
[20]Franz Kafka, 'Metamorphosis', *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, p. 9.

world, he now has to act and engage within it. This once again points to the text's submerged Augustinian component. George Steiner argues that Heidegger's notion of truth as something which is experienced, rather than simply perceived, is derived from book X of the *Confessions*:

> Already Augustine had warned against the obsessive *concupiscentia oculorum* [lust of the eyes] of philosophers, their Platonic insistence on "seeing" the essence of things instead of experiencing it with total existential commitment.[21]

Sammy's blindness can therefore be read as metaphorical re-enactment of the existential rejection of the essentialist gaze. Secondly, Sammy's blindness, like K.'s arrest and Samsa's metamorphosis (and we might add, Mersault's killing of the Arab in *The Outsider*) remains unexplained. Although the rep encourages Sammy to ascribe loss of sight to his police beating, this is never explicitly confirmed; the two events resemble more a Humean conjunction of events. This absence of causal efficacy, effectively a lack of determinism, again promotes the idea of thrownness and thereby underlines the basic existential qualities, freedom and contingency, which attach to human reality. For existentialists, the individual is foundationless, therefore Sammy's situation has no ultimate source, it just is, and so becomes a facticity to be negotiated. Finally however, blindness allows a focus upon the presence and absence of the look. Consider this passage:

> And a whole crash of thoughts. With one weird wee image to finish it all off: if this was permanent he wouldnay be able to see himself ever again. Christ that was wild. And he wouldnay see cunts looking at him. Wild right enough. What did it matter but what did it matter cunts looking at ye. Who gives a fuck. Just sometimes they bore their way in, some of them do anyway; they seem able to give ye a look that's more than a look; it's like when ye're a wean at school and there's this auld woman teacher who takes it serious even when you and the wee muckers are having a laugh and cracking jokes behind her back and suddenly she looks straight at ye and ye can tell she knows the score, she knows it's happening. Exactly. And it's only you. The rest dont notice. You see her and she sees you. Naybody else. Probably it's their turn next week. The now it's you she's copped. You. The jokes dont sound funny any longer. The auld bastard, she's fucked ye man. With one look. That's how easy you are. And ye see the truth then about

[21]George Steiner, *Heidegger*, p.78. See also *Being and Time*, p.215*ff*.

> yerself. Ye see how ye're fixed forever. Stupid wee fucking arsehole. Laughing with the rest because ye're feart no to, feart to stand out from the crowd; ye're just a wee fucking coward, trying to take the piss out an auld woman man pathetic, fucking pathetic. (*HL* 11-12)

Here, the novel deploys a fictive articulation of the Sartrean 'look'. An important concept in Sartre's ontology, the look, and its pivotal role in his discussion of being-with-others (and the Other in general) is initially an instrument for escaping "the reef of solipsism". Of greater significance to an understanding of Kelman's novel however is the philosophical basis of Sartre's theory. Sartre's model for human relations is based upon the Hegelian master/slave dialectic where Others are both necessary for our being and yet a threat to our possibilities and thus our freedom.[22] In its foregrounding of the binding effects of a particular look, *How Late* pays less attention to the positive, the affirmation that one is, and continually contends with the negative, the threat to the individual's freedom.

For Sartre, human relations are at best hostile; he tells us that "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others." (*BN* 364). Within this ontological picture, being-for-others is exemplified principally through being seen and thus the look is one of the pre-eminent mechanisms for transmitting and effecting this hostility:

> to perceive is to look at, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world [...] it is to be conscious of *being looked at*. The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are is a pure reference to myself. What I apprehend immediately [...] is not that *there is someone there*; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defence - in short, that *I am seen*. (*BN* 258-9).

Returning to the passage from *How Late*, it is evident that Sammy shares the equation of vision with hostility. Blindness he tells us entails that he "wouldnay be able to see himself ever again" but more importantly "he wouldnay see cunts looking at him".

[22]"Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is it exists only in being acknowledged." But, "the formative activity has not only this positive significance that in it the pure being-for-itself of the servile consciousness acquires an existence; it also has, in contrast with its first moment, the negative significance of *fear*." G W F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807, trans. A V Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.111, p.118.

Vision possesses an invasory property, what the blind philosopher Martin Milligan describes as "the especially intrusive character of sight".[23] Through vision Others, or The Other, "bore their way in". Here Sammy's choice of words repeat those of Inez in Sartre's dramatisation of the look, *In Camera*: "I shan't take my eyes of off you [...] you'll feel them boring in."[24] Notice here that vision is presented as something menacing. Her method of threatening Garcin is taken up by Sammy; he too sees vision in terms of forcible invasion: "a look that's more than a look." The look with which Sammy is picked out in the present is related to an incident in his past - "it's like when ye're a wean". His recollection of his earlier admonishment in the classroom becomes explicable in terms of Sartrean shame. With his classmates, Sammy is unreflectively absorbed in teasing the teacher, when she turns however, she looks straight at him, and the others disappear. Sammy is singled out, seen. Again this look carries a hostile charge - "she's fucked ye man" - but crucially carries a more ontologically significant component: "And ye see the truth then about yerself. Ye see how ye're fixed forever [...] ye're just a wee fucking coward." The crucial word here is "fixed", for this is the consequence of the look which Sartre describes: it inhibits freedom.

> The appearance of the Other [...] causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is *for the Other*. (*BN* 265)
>
> Through the Other's look I *live* myself as fixed in the midst of the world, as in danger, as irremediable. (*BN* 268)
>
> Once more the nihilating escape of the for-itself is fixed, once more the in-itself closes in upon the for-itself.(*BN* 262)

For Sartre, the Other's look is both the "solidification and alienation" of one's possibilities (*BN* 263) and Sartre's description accordingly utilises the language of pursuit and entrapment: the in-itself "closes in" upon the for-itself. It is therefore important that the incident which Sammy recalls is a remembered incident; it occurs in the past, for the past is the realm of the in-itself. It is indeed fixed, in perpetuity.

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[23]Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan, *Sight Unseen: Letters Between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p. 197.
[24]Jean-Paul Sartre, *In Camera*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, in ed. Martin Brown, *Three European Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp.149-191, p. 182. Subsequent references in parentheses.

As a property of another subjectivity, the look is external and therefore how Sammy appears to the other is something which he cannot control:

> there were things out his control. There was things in his control but there were other things out, they were out his control, he had put them out his control. (*HL* 7)

> it was always them that chose it; ye never had any fucking choices. Everything ye fucking did in life it was always fucking them, fucking them, them them them. (*HL* 32-3)

> He didnay want even to think about it, the situation, cause he couldnay control it, he couldnay do nothing that would help it. (*HL* 59)

Sammy puts things out of his control by converting himself into what the other sees. Thus his initial description of himself as "no a good man" becomes an internalised version of a definition imposed from without. Seeing oneself as others do is not, as in Burns, either positive or beneficial. It is debilitating for if one is controlled by the "they", defined by the "them", this effects a radical curtailment of choice and consequently a reduction of the individual's possibilities: it is a simply another form of imprisonment.

To illustrate the objectifying look Sartre famously employs the example of a jealous man apprehended whilst spying through a keyhole. He too is caught by the other's gaze and this look fixes the individual; identifies it completely with an immutable character and in so doing converts the fluctuating or transcendent for-itself into a static object.

> Shame [...] is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object. (*BN* 261)

> Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognising myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other. (*BN* 288)

Again, for the reading suggested here, it is significant that Sartre uses a vocabulary infused with legal language: "escapes" "guilty", "freedom", "judging". In Sammy's case the look of the teacher judges him and converts him into a coward. Cowardice, as an example of the objectifying action of the look, is discussed formally in *Being and Nothingness*, and fictionally in both the play *In Camera* and the novel *The Reprieve*.[25] Within the latter, the character Daniel, who shares with Sammy a Hebraic biblical name, believes himself the subject of "the inexorable look", which he equates with the "Medusa's petrifying gaze" (*R* 169). Petrification, turning into stone, articulates precisely the action of the look whereby the for-itself is transmuted, objectified, into in-itself:

> I am myself for all eternity, pederast, villain, coward. I *am seen*; no, not even that: *it sees* me. He was the object of a look. A look that searched him to the depths, pierced him like a knife-thrust, and was not his own look: an impenetrable look, the embodiment of night, awaiting him in his deepest self and condemning him to be himself [...] for all eternity [...] I am *seen*. Transparent, transparent, transfixed. (*R* 116-7)

Noticeably Daniel experiences the look as being omnipresent: "the look was there, and everywhere, silent transparent and mysterious" (*R* 168); "I have been continually under observation - even in my solitary room" (*R* 345). Under its felt weight, Daniel concedes his subjectivity, he sees himself always a pederast, but Sammy endeavours to retain his capacity for self-determination. To defeat the objectifying gaze, Sammy keeps moving, "just on, on" (*HL* 49), "ye just battered on" (*HL* 52) but eventually his movements resemble the *anabasis* and *katabasis* of a Beckettian hero. He ventures out only to turn back, and his movements until the climax of the novel are inexorably circular. In common with the characters in *No Exit*, Sammy's movements appear only to describe the walls of his prison[26]. However if we recall Kafka, then Sammy's actions regain a positive aspect. In *The Trial*, Block tells K. that

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[25]Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Reprieve*, p.345. References hereafter in parenthesis.
[26]It is perhaps worth pointing out here that the first British production of *Huis Clos* opened on 16 July 1946 under the title *Vicious Circle*.

> it's better for a suspected man to keep on the move than be stationary, for the man who is stationary may, without knowing it, be in the scales and weighed with his sins. (*Trial* 217))

Reading *How Late* alongside Kafka modifies how one interprets the presentation of the look. There is a key divergence between the looks to which Sammy and Daniel are subject. Given that Daniel in Hebrew signifies 'the lord is judge', it is unsurprising that he identifies the all pervasiveness of the look with God: "Thou lookest at me"; "Before God and before men, I *am*."(*R* 169, 346). Here the deliberately biblical language evokes the book of Job: "I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42. 2). God's look is omnipresent and omniscient, but Sammy being an atheist secularises the look. Instead of an omniscient God - whilst in prison Sammy explicitly rejects the notion - it is the look of an omniscient state with which he feels himself 'fixed'. Daniel's biblical 'He' becomes Sammy's secular "they":

> ye saw their eyes, going this way and that, flickering about; either they didnay look at ye or else they bored right in, they fucking bored right in [...] they were fucking staring right into yer brain to say what ye were really saying like what was coming out was a cover up for something else. [...] they look at ye, they stare at ye, they try to screw ye. It's worse than a nightmare, cause it's happening, it's all round ye and ye cannay see fuck all else. It's everywhere ye look. (*HL* 207-8).

The 'Medusa Complex', Sartre's term for the paranoiac dread of objectification caused by the felt gaze of the Other, engulfs Daniel and maintains itself as a constant possibility for Sammy. At the DSS offices, Sammy is convinced that the lift is bugged, and that the oxygen levels within the building are deliberately maintained at a low level in order to inhibit thinking. His monologues contain numerous references to "spooks" and "blabbers" and on two occasions he believes that he is being followed. The rep takes this behaviour as evidence of Sammy's general paranoia but this perpetual unease, the idea of concealed plots and covert proceedings, are qualities which *How Late* shares with both *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Sartre provides the formal existential explication of these fictional Kafkan tropes. The Other represents that which the I cannot control or foresee. Consequently, the Other's look introduces

an alien unpredictability into one's situation. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes how

> It is this unpredictability which Kafka's art attempts to describe in *The Trial* and *The Castle*. In one sense everything K. and the Surveyor are doing belongs strictly to them in their own right, and so insofar as they act upon the world the results conform strictly to anticipations; they are successful acts. But at the same time the *truth* of these acts constantly escapes them; the acts have on principle a meaning which is their *true meaning* and which neither K. nor the Surveyor will ever know. Without doubt Kafka is trying here to express the transcendence of the divine; it is for the divine that the human act is constituted in truth. But God here is only the Other pushed to the limit. [...]. That gloomy evanescent atmosphere of *The Trial*, that ignorance which, however, is lived as ignorance, that total opacity which can only be felt as a presentiment across a total translucency - this is nothing but the description of our being-in-the-midst-of-the-world-for-others. (*BN* 265-6)

Where Sartre posits a religious explanation, Kelman in secularising Kafka retains the look but effectively translates all talk of God into talk of The State. In *How Late* it is the state which is the Other "pushed to the limit"; it is the look of the state which "constitutes" and constricts the individual. With its inaccessible files which contain the lives of individuals, its discreet monitoring and the prevalent constancy of its gaze, the State becomes the twentieth century God.

Through its representation of officialdom, Kelman's novel contends with another familiar aspect of Kafka's fictive world. Sartre describes how "the universe of the fantastic seems like a bureaucracy"[27], and bureaucratic processes present another source of immural for Samuels. Disclosed primarily by Sammy's contact with the deeply ambiguous "rep", but additionally in the passages detailing his interviews with both the DSS and the doctors assigned to assess his case, official procedures are depicted as mechanisms for controlling and subduing individuals. For Kafka, bureaucrats "transform living, changing human beings into dead code numbers, incapable of any change."[28] The police who describe Sammy as a "loose end" (*HL*

[27] Jean-Paul Sartre, '*Aminadab*, or the Fantastic Considered as a Language', *Literary Essays*, p. 64.

[28] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, 1951, trans. Goronwy Rees (London: André Deutsch, 1968), p.19.

186) and an "added complication" (*HL* 200) suggest Sammy's relegation from subjectivity to objectivity. *How Late* shares Kafka's conviction that bureaucrats and state functionaries serve only to delete and restrict individual possibilities; the procedures which they carry out classify and process, objectify and limit.

The succession of state employees who confront Sammy seem intended to trigger precisely these Kafkan resonances. Pressured into pursuing a claim, Sammy first encounters a nameless Preliminary Officer. A long series of questions ensue and then Samuels, converted now into a case, is referred to a nameless woman, who decides that Sammy is to be referred to the PDBO (Police Department Benefits Office) who have a further array of interrogative criteria and so on. This is Kelman's restatement of the vast impenetrable machinery of Kafka's Court, and also the convoluted structure of the Gogolian Civil Service depicted in 'The Overcoat'. Having met the anonymous officials, none of whom seem to possess the authority to resolve Sammy's problems, the rep suddenly appears who seems for no apparent reason to possess all the details of Sammy's case. Sammy then attends a meeting with Doctor Logan who describes Sammy's reported situation as "deeply ambiguous" (*HL* 217). Logan recounts an earlier report from a Doctor Crozier, suggesting that Sammy suffers/suffered from a deep anxiety. The doctor concludes that "No one is unique" (*HL* 222) thereby explicitly setting himself against Sammy's earlier statement that "we're all different, we've all got different lives [...] different influences and different experiences." (*HL* 59) Logan's language and syntax frequently mimic the obfuscation which the procedural process induces:

> well I dare say that if a claim in respect of a found dysfunction is allowed then an application in respect of a customer's wants that may be consistent with the found dysfunction becomes open to discharge by the appropriate charitable agency. (*HL* 223-4)

Official jargon distorts and masks, consuming the maximum amount of words in delivering the least amount of sense. Trying to get Sammy to pursue a claim, the rep advises him of the protocols and procedures necessary for such an action. The rep's admonition "It's no like going to an ordinary court" (*HL* 304) repeats almost verbatim K.'s avowal: "there's no question of this being a trial before an ordinary kind of

court." (*Trial* 115). For Sammy, the problem is not with individuals but with the state which they serve and the processes they are charged with carrying out: "it wasnay a case of blaming the sodjers, that was stupit, nay fucking point; it's the system; they just take their orders." (*HL* 63). This replicates K.'s contention that the "outward manifestations", his arrest and the investigation to which he is subject, are only signs of a "huge organisation". (*Trial* 62) For Samuels the police and the DSS officials are only tokens of the state, the anonymous 'they'.

In *How Late*, the 'they' of the Disability Court operate upon the same system as that of *The Trial*.

> Ye've got to remember it isnay up to them to find a proof. That's up to you, cause it's you that's pursuing the claims. They only need to say they've beat you and that means they can dismiss the case. They're what ye call an autonomous body, they don't have to account to authorities higher than themselves - except in the case of the Chairperson who's always a lay-officer of the cloth. (*HL* 303)

Reversing the traditional legal dictum of innocent until proven otherwise, this passage again restates a moment from *The Trial* and K.s description of "the very highest Court, which is absolutely inaccessible" (*Trial* 181). Sammy does not submit a claim, reasoning that "all their fucking protocols and procedures" are "just how they suffocate ye." (*HL* 321)

If Camus and Kierkegaard generate the thematic content of *A Disaffection*, then *How Late* is Kelman's most Kafkan novel. Unlike Doyle, Samuels seems to choose to resolve his condition. He chooses to act. Beckett suggests that "The Kafka hero has coherence of purpose. He's lost, but he's not falling to bits [...] Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller".[29] If Doyle is "falling to bits" then Sammy's "coherence of purpose" is manifest in his attempt to escape, to become free, and the novel ends with him achieving this. In *The Reprieve*, Daniel states that "a man evaporates without an eye-witness" (*R* 168). Sammy's 'road to freedom' lies along

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[29]Israel Shenker, 'An Interview with Beckett', *New York Times*, 5 May 1956, rpt.; eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp.146-9, p.148.

the same route. At the beginning of the novel, Sammy describes how "the only fucking way to cope is by disappearing for six or seven hours out of every twenty-four." (*HL* 30) Throughout, disappearance remains in Sammy's mind. Sammy tells how he "once read a story about a guy that vanished. But it was unbelievable." (*HL* 255) The 'literal' invisibility described by, presumably, H G Wells, is impossible, but there are other ways of vanishing.

> He could vamoose but if he wanted to. [...] A blind man hits London. He would get off at Victoria. It was aye a great feeling when ye left the bus. All the Glasgow accents disappear. As soon as ye step down onto the ground; everybody merges into the scenery, no looking at one another. And then ye're anonymous. That was the fucking crack man know what I'm talking about getting anonymous, that was what it was all about, getting fucking anonymous; nay cunt giving ye hassle. (*HL* 255)

Anonymity, which is desired, is achieved through "no looking at one another", "merging into the scenery". Near the end of the novel Sammy tells how he is "preparing to vanish" (*HL* 331) and the novel ends with him "out of sight" (*HL* 374). Sammy the character disappears from the novel, and thus from the reader's sight: the other as reader no longer looks on.

Kelman's text discloses a fundamental paradoxicality. Sammy functions as a modern Tiresias; a blind man who nevertheless 'sees' the ills of a particular society. In the watched society described by the novel, the person being observed is blind. As a realist text, albeit in the Kafkan mode, *How Late* witnesses a particular form of life but features a character who cannot witness anything. When the rep asks Sammy if he is really blind, he simultaneously poses the question on behalf of the reader. The novel seems to hint that Sammy's blindness is feigned. "But he had decided. Right there and then. It was here he made the decision and he was smiling." (*HL* 3) What Sammy decides is never made explicit but the suggestion may be that he decides to assume the role of a blind man. It is therefore significant that Sammy repeats this smile when the story closes. One could therefore read blindness, whether real or not, as one of Sammy's "wee survival plans": if he is blind then he cannot see himself looked at. If he can avoid the look then an avenue of freedom opens up. Sammy requires freedom,

for the notions of visibility and invisibility conjure too the world explored by Ralph Ellison of the marginal and the neglected. Kelman works to supplement the significatory possibilities of blindness by adding economic detail to existential thought. Within *How Late*, blindness has an additional function in that it serves as an index of marginalisation, what Martin Milligan terms "visionism" (70)

> Blind people have been isolated - pushed into a corner, herded into special institutions for the blind, and cut off from the mainstream of the life of their societies - not by their blindness but by the decisions of sighted people. (61)

Sammy wakes in a corner and his blindness exacerbates his relative poverty - "This being blind man it meant ye needed dough; ye couldnay just go places." (*HL* 71) As Brian Magee highlights

> many blind people are relatively immobile, being limited to the confines of their own room or to a very restricted area. But it would be a mistake to think of such limitations as being imposed by their blindness, for such limitations are imposed primarily by their poverty or lack of support. (206)

The addition of socio-economic detail to ontological questions is Kelman's characteristic contribution to the existential tradition.

How Late is however Kelman's most optimistic novel. Whilst *A Disaffection*, *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Chancer* fail to resolve - Doyle remains as disaffected as when the novel starts, we do not know if Tammas does go to London, Robert Hines returns to the buses - Samuels achieves his objective, he does escape. And through the usage of the second person pronoun, Kelman achieves a progression, further developing and refining what Laura Cumming terms the "formal democracy"[30] of his prose style.

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[30]Laura Cumming, 'Blind Justice', *The Guardian*, G2, 22 March 1994, pp.12-13, p.13.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

> Only specialists or nostalgics now study Sartre [...] many of us who came to what we naively took to be intellectual maturity [...] now wonder at how innocent, ignorant and uncritical we then were.
> **Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *Scotland After Enlightenment*** [1]

> Real intellectual analysis forbids calling one side innocent, the other evil. Indeed the notion of a side is, where cultures are at issue, highly problematic, since most cultures aren't watertight little packages, all homogenous, and all either good or evil.
> **Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*.** [2]

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[1]Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *Scotland After Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Modern Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997), p.154.
[2]Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.89.

The purpose of this thesis has been to establish and demonstrate the ways in which Kelman constructs and discloses an existential literature. Chapters one and two square the frame, bringing forth the parameters within which and from which Kelman works. Then, through analysing particular texts in chapters three, four, five and six, we have seen how existential philosophy and existential literature inform both the content and technique of Kelman's novelistic prose. Kelman produces everyday situated fictions, where focus upon an individual in an individual set of circumstances divulges universal existential themes such as absurdity, contingency, possibility and, temporality. Attention to these themes indicates a general thematic, and this thematic is I have argued, freedom, self-determination. We have seen that Kelman's work is devoted to the depiction of precarious and problematic freedoms, struggling freedoms. Given that it is an existential freedom - it relates to individual relationships, it is *self*-determination - it follows that existentialism, rather than nationalism, is the source and field of Kelman's politicised aesthetic. With this movement, Kelman's work conflicts with that of cultural nationalists, in particular Beveridge and Turnbull.

For Beveridge and Turnbull, Scotland has been intellectually colonised by England. The intellectual traditions and identity of the former have been engulfed, usurped, or 'inferiorised' by the colonial dominancy of the latter. This colonial process is felt to be particularly acute in philosophy.

> Philosophy departments in Scottish universities have become mere outposts of Anglo-American philosophy; and our intelligentsia seem entirely ignorant of Scottish philosophers who have resisted the specialising tendencies of this tradition, its break with philosophy in the Continental style, and its retreat to issues remote from social and political life. A central task of cultural nationalism is the recovery of Scottish cultural practices (like these native philosophical traditions) which have been submerged by the intelligentsia's adoption of English critical modes.[3]

To combat this imperialism, Beveridge and Turnbull assert that it is necessary to re-articulate, revive, and turn back to these occluded cultural practices. There is however a problem here, for even were we to accept that Turnbull and Beveridge

[3]Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p.15.

construct a valid argument, its soundness is nevertheless compromised, and it is compromised because as David McCrone points out, the argument only works if *national* cultures exist. Kelman's writing, and McCrone's own work, argue that they do not.

> We might, however, ask an altogether more radical set of questions: Why should there be an obsessive search to find a national identity? Why is the question even framed this way? Where does it come from? The answer is that it derives from an older, essentially nationalist assumption that all societies worthy of the name should have a distinctive culture. Despite the fairly critical stances taken against political Nationalism by Scottish intellectuals, this perspective seems to echo its assumption that Scotland has (or had) a 'national' culture waiting to be discovered.[4]

The question is framed this way because Turnbull and Beveridge only see culture in national terms, they do not see culture as something which individuals might construct for themselves, and consequently they are committed to seeing cultural conflict as a conflict between two homogenous national blocs: England and Scotland. They ignore the local, at least as Kelman understands it, and thus they see self-determination as a property of a people, but a people *qua* carriers, tokens, of a national identity. Authenticity is not then, as in existential writing, a matter of individual self-responsibility, of the exercise of creative freedom, but is instead something to be gauged against how well one conforms to preordained cultural patterns. For Beveridge and Turnbull, the cultural present and the cultural future are to be measured against, and brought about through, conformity to a tendentious national cultural past. Either you agree with, or conform to, this picture or you have been 'Anglicised'. It follows then that if *X* does not 'fit' this essentialist construction of identity, then *X*, whether a person or an intellectual practice, is not 'Scottish', is not authentic. But this is simply a variation of the 'no-true-Scotsman' fallacy, for it is designed to remove troublesome exceptions by recasting or manipulating *essentialist* definitions. Beveridge and Turnbull simply fail to see that within any given country, an individual, or a group of individuals, might adopt a particular philosophical approach, or a particular conception of philosophical method, purely because it is felt, or

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[4]*Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation*, p. 190.

reasoned to be, a better conceptual or explanatory tool. In particular, they suggest that if an 'English' thought model is adopted then this is an instance of cultural imperialism; if a 'Continental' model is adopted, then this is an example of fruitful conversation and mutually enriching intellectual interplay. Thus they operate a philosophical customs' point where a crude check - Continental equals 'good'; English equals 'bad' - determines what philosophies may be admitted into 'Scotland'. Crucially however, this performs at an individual level precisely what it seeks to combat at a national level, for it *colonises*, in Kelman's sense of the term. It colonises, for it restricts *individual* freedom by calling for that individual to adopt, maintain, and valorize a pre-cast *national* cultural form. In seeking to make identity a product of *national* difference, Beveridge and Turnbull eradicate difference at the level of the individual: nations are culturally different, but the individuals within them, in order to be authentic, should all partake and exhibit this supposedly homogenous culture. The individual ought to adopt a cultural practice simply because he or she is contingently born within the contingent geographical space in which these contingent cultural practices arose. This is simply intellectual bad faith. Kelman shows that one can insist upon cultural validity, resist colonisation and remain authentic without multiplying entities, without conjuring the national. Instead, Kelman premises and locates questions of identity and culture upon and within an individual, in a concrete, local, and processional culture. Culture, like the individual existential self, can always be changed, it is neither static nor finalised. According to McCrone, the task then is "not to identify the unique Scottish experience, but to address the universal condition through day-to-day (Scottish) reality." (193) For this sentence to describe Kelman's work, all that is required is the erasure or suspension of the bracketed 'Scottish'; all that is required is the existential.

The importance of philosophy to Kelman is evident from a letter to *Edinburgh Review* in which he protests over the then impending closure of the philosophy department at Strathclyde University. "If the study of philosophy leads to anything it is to philosophising itself, of raising the fundamental question, the 'truth' which is taken for granted, that basic premise we sense intuitively to be wrong"[5]. This quotation sources

[5]James Kelman, 'Letters', *Edinburgh Review*, no 83 (1990), 157.

Kelman's conception within a practice of critical philosophy. Philosophy exists to empower the individual "to challenge the foundations of truth", and to "question at the level most likely to frighten authority." The precise type of question which philosophy raises is made explicit in Kelman's foreword to George Davie's *The Scottish Enlightenment and Other Essays*:

> Do people have the fundamental right to freedom? By what authority does one person, or a group of people control another? Is there a case for assuming responsibility over the social and spiritual life of other adults? When does 'teaching' become colonization? Can one culture ever be 'better' than another? Is the attempt to deny your right to exploit me 'unconstitutional'?[6]

As Kelman notes, these questions are at once political as well as philosophical. Through articulating such points, Kelman enters what might be termed the tradition of the committed intellectual. Kelman declines both the aristocratism inherent in the thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Ortega y Gasset, and the apoliticality and ethical vacuum in Heidegger[7], adopting instead an altogether more engaged and politicised attitude. Philosophy is a critical tool. In this he resembles Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, but also Foucault, Chomsky and Edward Said. Kelman's commitment reveals itself through his work on behalf of the victims of asbestosis, the rights of Kurdish refugees, his pamphlet highlighting the plight of the steel industry in Scotland, and his *Guardian* article following the murder of Stephen Lawrence.[8] Whilst all of Kelman's work can be positioned within a general commitment to freedom, the range of Kelman's extra-fictional concerns propels his work into an area familiar from Sartre, Said and perhaps above all Noam Chomsky[9].

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[6]James Kelman, 'Foreword' in George Davie, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), [n.p.].

[7]I intend here the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Heidegger did of course make an infamous incursion into the political, but whether National Socialism makes itself apparent in this work is an ongoing and moot point.

[8]See 'A Brief Note on the War Being Waged by the State Against the Victims of Asbestosis' in *Some Recent Attacks*, pp.59-63; 'Into Barbarism', *The Guardian*, 22 September 1995, p.19; *Fighting for Survival: The Steel Industry in Scotland* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1990).

[9]See in particular Jean-Paul Sartre, 'A Plea for Intellectuals' in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, pp.228-285; Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994) and Chomsky's

All work against the 'cult of the expert', thus Kelman's approval of George Davie's idiosyncratic account of 'Scottish' thought in *The Democratic Intellect* is valued not because it is 'Scottish', but because it advances a claim for a generalist education centred around the study of philosophy. Again, it is the idea which counts, not its geographical origin.

Kelman's position is though not without its own problems. For whilst Kelman enshrines cultural validity, his claim that this validity extends equally to all cultures seems problematic. If every culture is valid then are the criticisms directed at his work from Rabbi Neuberger, Howard Jacobson or Simon Wheeler 'valid'? Does a racist culture have the right to exist? Here a problem common to existential philosophies arises, for if freedom entails or demands a complete lack of fetters in the process of self-determination, then there seems to be no position from where a conflict of freedoms might be resolved. To redeem this, existential thought tends not to adhere to its foundational and individualistic principles. Both Kelman and Sartre have to introduce a Kantian component, a categorical imperative, whereby people are free only in so far as their exercise of freedom does not impinge upon others. Freedom to and freedom from rub against each other. It is not however clear how freedom can be thus regulated. A similar problem infects the anarchist tradition to which Kelman relates himself. The traditional arbiter of individual conflict is the state but in an anarchic society, or a mode of thought based upon an anarchist position, this referee is necessarily absent. Secondly, existential identity is individual identity yet Kelman tends to move between the individual and the group, between an I and a class, a we, without ever explaining the route traversed to get there. As John Macquarrie[10] highlights, a philosophy with a predominance of the social hardly qualifies as existential. Yet it remains unclear how Kelman can be an existentialist and yet effect this shift. Finally, as Douglas Dunn[11] points out, Kelman dismisses too briefly those writers with whom he disagrees. He never quite gets around to explaining precisely

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American Power and the New Mandarins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp.246-290.

[10]John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

[11]Douglas Dunn, 'I'm right, and good, you're bad', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 January 1993, p.5.

what is at fault in the writing of Waugh, Larkin or Kingsley Amis. Dunn writes that Kelman's "differentiation of "good writer" and "bad writer" is essentially moral, and morality is to a large extent associated with the political convictions which Kelman finds obvious and necessary." (ibid.) Kelman tends to dismiss English literature *en bloc*, precisely the sort of totalising or essentialising move one would expect an existentialist to reject. An assertion such as "There is just no question that Joseph Conrad was a racist" (*SRA* 9) is also problematic. Kelman's sole evidence for this is Chinua Achebe and yet as Cedric Watts points out in his introduction to a selection of Conrad's tales, the position is not shared by other African writers.[12] As Dunn records, it is possible to be a bad person and yet a good artist. Dunn's example is Larkin, but perhaps more apposite here would be Dostoevsky, Knut Hamsun and Céline, or philosophically, Heidegger.

These criticisms however are fissures rather than chasms. What is important about Kelman's existentialism is that is re-circulates these questions, it forces, in the Sartrean manner, questions of freedom to arise. In so doing it redraws that which Foucault saw washed away upon a nameless beach in the sixties. Significantly, Kelman's writing occurs over a span when Sartre is once again a subject of serious academic investigation[13]. In a volume of essays analysing Sartre's contribution to twentieth-century thought, one of the editors, Jean-François Fournay writes

> it is the subject, which the New Novel and poststructuralism wanted so badly to erase once and for all, that is returning. [...] The subject discussed these days is not of course the European, male, bourgeois subject of thirty years ago. What I am referring to is a renewed concern through various approaches for a subjectivity once deemed dead. The collapse of communism and the threat of neo-fascism across the world have once again brought the very old question of individual freedom to the fore. Whatever was said during the seventies about the absence of absolutes and the impossibility of freedom and justice, the

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[12]Watts mentions that the African writers Lewis Nkosi and Mathew Buyu both read *Heart of Darkness* as a criticism of racism. Cedric Watts, 'Introduction' in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.vii-xxiii, p.xvii

[13]See for instance George Steiner, 'The last philosopher?: Generosity, bad faith and heroism in the torrential lifework of Jean-Paul Sartre', *Times Literary Supplement*, May 19 2000, pp.3-4.

> fact remains that all persons, sophisticated or simple, male or female, Caucasian, Asian, or people of African descent, do know freedom and lack of freedom, justice and injustice, fairness and oppression when they see them [...].[14]

This is, I would suggest, why Kelman finds an existential position so appealing: these problems of individual freedom constitute the matter of Kelman's writing.

I close by indicating some avenues of study which are, were, beyond the remit of this thesis. I have sought to describe the relation between Kelman and the existential tradition, this has meant that I have neglected various writers whom Kelman picks out and praises: Lu Hsun, Isaac Loeb Peretz, Sadaat Hasan Manto. Future work might evolve through assessing a possible relation between these authors and Kelman's existentially inspired anti-colonialism. Also, in stressing the existential basis of Kelman's writing, I have had little occasion to point to a relation with anarchism. Thus a further work would involve an investigation of anarchist literature, and how Kelman's existential texts reflect, refract, or build upon anarchist thought models. Proper consideration of these would however constitute another thesis, the present one has reached its end.

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[14]Jean-François Fourny, 'From a Post-Imperial Point of View', in eds. Jean-François Fourny and Charles D Minahen, *Situating Sartre in Twentieth-Century Thought and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp.1-10, p.1-2.

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